THE GOLDEN CALF

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

In Three Volumes.

VOL. II.

LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET

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THE GOLDEN CALF.

CHAPTER I.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AT A DISCOUNT.

Now began for Ida a life of supreme dullness—an empty, almost hopeless life, waiting upon fortune, Her father was kind to her in his easy-going lymphatic way, liking well enough to have her about him, pleased with her affection for his boy, proud of her beauty and her talents, but with no earnest care for her welfare in the present or the future. What was to become of wife, son, and daughter when he was dead and gone, was a question which Captain Palliser dared not ask himself. For the widow there would be a pittance, for son and daughter nothing. It was therefore vital that Ida should either marry well or become

a money-earning personage. Of marriage at Les Fontaines there seemed not the faintest probability, since the experiences of the past afford so few instances of wandering swains caught and won by a face at a window, or the casual appearance of a beautiful girl on a country road.

Of friends or acquaintance, in his present abode, Captain Palliser had none. The only people he had ever cared for were the men and women he had known in India; and he had lost sight of those since his marriage. They were scattered; and he was too proud to expose his fallen fortunes to those who had known him in his happier days, those days when the careless expenditure of his modest capital had given him a false air of easy circumstances.

His life at Les Fontaines suited him well enough, individually. It was a kind of hibernation. He slept a good deal, and ate a good deal, and smoked incessantly, and took very little exercise. For all that is best and noblest in life, Captain Palliser might just as well have been dead. He had outlived hope and ambition, thought, invention. He exercised no influence upon the lives of

others, except upon the little homely wife, who was a slave to him. He was no possible good in the world. Yet his daughter was fond of him, and pleased to bear him company when he would have her; and under her influence his sluggish intellect brightened a little.

For the first few weeks of her residence at Les Fontaines, Ida was tortured by a continually recurring fear of Brian Wendover's pursuit. He had let her go coolly enough; but what if he were to change his mind and follow and claim her? She belonged to him. She was his goods, his chattels —to have and to hold till death did them part. Her life was no longer her own to dispose of as she pleased. Would he let her alone? he who had held her in his arms with passionate force, who had entreated her to stay with him, and had surrendered her reluctantly in sullen anger.

What if anger, which had been stronger with him than love at that last moment, should urge him to denounce her—to tell the world how base a thing she was—a woman who had been eager to marry a rich man, and had been trapped by a

pauper! She glanced with a sickening dread at every letter which her father received, lest it should be from Brian, telling her shameful story. She counted the days as they went by, saying to herself, 'A fortnight since we were married; surely if he had meant to claim me he would have come before now.' 'Three weeks! now I must be safe!' And then came the dull November morning which completed the calendar month since her wedding-day, and her husband had made no sign. She began to feel easier, to believe that he repented his marriage as deeply as she did, and that he was very glad to be free from its bondage.

And now she was able to think more seriously of her future. She had answered a great many advertisements in the *Times*, wherein paragons were demanded for the tuition of youth or the companionship of age; but as she saw the papers only on the day after their publication, other paragons, on the spot, were beforehand with her. She did not receive a single answer to those carefully written letters, setting forth her qualifications and her willingness to work hard.

'I shall waste a small fortune in postage-stamps, father,' she said at last, 'and shall be no nearer the mark. My only chance is to advertise. Will you give me the money for an advertisement? I am sorry to ask you, but——'

'My dear, you are always asking me for money,' replied Captain Palliser, peevishly; which was hardly fair, as she had asked him nothing since her return, except the sum of thirty shillings, being the exact amount of which she stood indebted to kind-hearted Miss Cobb. 'However, I suppose you must have it.' He produced a half sovereign from his meagrely-furnished purse. 'It is only right you should do something; indeed, anything is better than wasting your life in such a hole as this. But what if you do get any answers to your advertisement? Who is to give you a character, since that old witch at Mauleverer Manor has chosen to put up her back against you?'

'That must be managed somehow,' answered Ida moodily. 'Will it not be enough for the people to know who you are, and that I have never been in a situation before? Why should they apply

to the schoolmistress who finished my education?'

'People are so suspicious,' said the Captain, 'and the handsomer a girl is the more questions they ask. They seem to think she has no right to be so handsome. However, you must risk it.'

Ida wrote her advertisement, an unvarnished statement of her qualifications as a teacher, and of her willingness to be useful; not a word about references. The advertisement appeared a few days later, and the little family at Les Fontaines anxiously awaited the result, even little Vernon eagerly expressing himself on the subject, his youthful ears being open to every topic discussed in his presence, and his youthful mind quick to form opinions.

'You shan't go away,' he exclaimed. 'Ma, she shan't go, shall she? lady shan't have her; I want her always; you musn't go, sissie,' all in baby language, with a curious perversion of consonants. He had climbed on her knee, and had his arms round her neck—energetic young arms which almost throttled her. She had been his chief companion and playfellow for the last five weeks, had read

him all his favourite fairy-tales over and over again, had sat with him of an evening till he fell asleep, an invincible defence against bogies and vague fears of darkness. She had taken him for long rural rambles, over breezy downs towards the sea, had dug and delved with him on the lonely beach below the great white lighthouse, warmly coated and shawled, and working hard in the November wind; and now, just when he had grown fonder of her than anyone else in the world, she was going to leave him. He lifted up his head and howled, and refused all comfort from mother or father. Ida cried with him. 'My pet, I can't bear to leave you, but I must; my darling, I shall come back,' she protested, clasping him to her breast, kissing his fair, tearful face, soft round cheeks, lovely blue eyes swimming in tears.

'To-morrow?' inquired Vernon, with a strangled sob.

'No, darling, not to-morrow; there would be no use in my going just for one day; but I am not going yet—I don't know when I am going—Vernon must not cry. See how unhappy he is making poor mamma.'

Mrs. Palliser put her hands before her face, and made a bohooing noise to keep up the illusion; whereupon the affectionate little fellow slipped off his sister's knee, and ran to his mother to administer comfort.

'I am not going away yet, Vernon; indeed, I hardly know whether I am ever going at all. I have come back like a bad penny, and I seem likely to be as difficult to get rid of as other bad pennies,' said Ida, despondingly, for three posts had gone by since the insertion of her advertisement, and had brought her nothing. The market was evidently overstocked with young ladies knowing French and German, able to play and sing, and willing to be useful.

After this Vernon would hardly let his sister out of his sight. He had a suspicion that she would leave him unawares—slip out of the door some day, and be gone without a moment's warning. That is how joy flees.

'My pet, be reasonable,' said Ida; 'I can't go away without my trunk.'

This comforted him a little, and he made a point

of sitting upon one of Ida's trunks, when they two were alone in that barely furnished chamber which served for her bed-room and his day-nursery.

She contrived to tell him fairy-tales, and to keep him amused; albeit she was now busy at carefully overhauling, patching, and repairing her scanty wardrobe--trying to make neat mending do duty for new clothes, and getting ready against any sudden summons. She could not bring herself to ask her father for money, sadly as she wanted new garments. He had given her five pounds in August, and two sovereigns since her return, and the way he had doled out those sums indicated the low state of his funds. No, the gown that had been new at The Knoll must still be her best gown. Last winter's jacket, albeit threadbare in places, must do duty for this winter. Before the next summer she might be in the receipt of a salary and able to clothe herself decently, and to send presents to this beloved boy, who was not much better clad than herself.

But the days wore on, and brought no answer to her advertisement.

'I shouldn't wonder if it were the foreign address,' said Captain Palliser, when they were all speculating upon the cause of this dismal silence. 'People are suspicious of anyone living abroad. If you had been able to advertise from a rectory in Lincolnshire, or even an obscure street at the west-end of London—they'd have thought better of you. But Boulogne, Calais, Dieppe, they all hint at impecuniosity and enforced exile. It's very unlucky.'

The postman stopped at the little green gate next morning, and Ida flew to receive his packet. It was a letter for her—a bulky letter—in a hand she knew well, and her heart seemed to stop beating as she looked at the address.

The hand was Bessie Wendover's. Who could tell what new trouble the letter might announce? Brian might have told his family the whole history of his marriage and her unworthy conduct. Oh, what shame, what agony, if this were so! and how was she to face her father when he asked her the contents of the letter? She ran out into the garden—the little bare, joyless garden—to read her letter alone, and to gain time.

This is how the dreaded epistle ran :—

'My dear darling, ill-used, cruel thing,—

'However could you treat me so badly? What is friendship worth, if you set no higher value upon it than this? I don't believe you know what friendship means, or you never could act so. How miserable you have made me! how wretched you must have been yourself! you proud, noble-minded darling—under the sting of such vile treatment.

'I wrote to you three times last month, and could not imagine why my letters were unanswered. Brian had told me that you were perfectly well, and looking splendid when he saw you in October, so I did not think it could be illness that kept you silent; and at last I began to feel angry, and to fancy you had forgotten me, and were ungrateful. No, I don't mean that, dearest. What reason had you for gratitude? The obligation was all on my side.

'Towards the end of October I wrote to Brian, telling him of your silence, and asking if he could find out if you were well. He answered with one

of his short, unsatisfactory scrawls that he had reason to know you were quite well. After this I felt *really* offended; for I thought you must have deceived me all along, and that you had never cared a straw about me; so I coiled myself up in my dignity, and although I felt very unhappy, I resolved never to write you another line till you wrote to me. I was very miserable, but still I felt that I owed a duty to my own self-respect, don't you know; and just at this time we all went to Bournemouth, where we were very gay. Father and mother knew no end of people there, and I began to feel what it really is to be out, which no girl ever could at Kingthorpe, where there are about three parties in a twelvemonth.

'Well, darling, so I went on leading a frivolous life among people I did not care twopence for, and hardening my heart against my dearest friend, when, on the day we came home, I happened to take up the *Times* in the railway carriage. I hate newspapers in a common way, but one reads such things when one is travelling, and out of mere idleness I amused myself skimming the advertise-

ments, which I found ever so much more interesting than the leading articles. What should my eye light upon but an advertisement from a young lady wanting to go out as a governess—address I. P., Le Rosier, Les Fontaines, near Dieppe—and the whole murder was out. You must have left old Pew's, and be living with your father. I was horribly indignant with you—as, indeed, I am still—for not having told me anything about it; but directly I got home I telegraphed to Polly Cobb, as the best-natured girl I knew at Mauleverer, asking where you were, and why you had left. I had such a letter from her next day—spelling bad, but full of kind feeling—giving me a full account of the row, and old Pew's detestable conduct. She told me that Fraulein vouched for your having behaved with the most perfect propriety, and never having seen Brian out of her presence; but Brian's meanness in not having told me about the trouble he had brought upon you is more than I can understand.

'Well, darling, I went off to Aunt Betsy, who is always my *confidante* in all delicate

matters, because she's ever so much cleverer than dear warm-hearted mother, who never could keep a secret in her life, sweet soul, and is no better than a speaking-tube for conveying information to the Colonel. I told Aunt Betsy everything—how it was all Brian's fault, and how I adore you, and how miserable I felt about you, and how you were trying to get a situation as governess, in spite of that malignant old Pew—she must be a lineal descendant of the wicked fairy—having said she would give you no certificate of character or ability.

'Now, what do you think that sweetest and best of aunties said? "Let her come to me," she said; "I am getting old and dull, and I want something bright and clever about me, to cheer me and rouse me when I feel depressed. Let her come to me as a companion and amanuensis, help me to look after my cottagers, who are getting too much for me, and play to me of an evening. I like that girl, and I should like to have her in my house."

'I was enchanted at the thought of your

being always near us, and I fancied you wouldn't altogether dislike it; although Kingthorpe certainly is the dullest, sleepiest old hole in the universe. So I begged Aunt Betsy to write to you *instanter;* said I knew you would be charmed to accept such a situation, and that she would secure a treasure; and, in all probability, you'll have a letter from her to-morrow.

'And now, dear, I must repeat that you have treated me shamefully. Why did you not write to me directly you left Mauleverer? Could you think that I could believe you had really done wrong—that I could possibly be influenced by the judgment of that old monster, Pew? If you could think so, you are not worthy to be loved as I love you. However, come to us, sweetest, directly you get auntie's letter, and all shall be forgiven and forgotten, as the advertisements say.'

Ida kissed the loving letter. So far, therefore, Brian had not betrayed her; and, having kept her secret so long, it might be supposed he would keep it for all time.

Poor little warm-hearted Bessie! Was not she

by her foolish falsification — a piece of mild jocosity, no doubt—the prime author of all the evil that had followed? And yet Ida could not feel angry with her, any more than she could have been angry with Vernon for some piece of sportive mischief.

'Thank God, he has kept our wretched secret,' she thought, as she folded Bessie's long letter, and went back to the house. 'I am grateful to him for that.'

She went in radiant, gladdened at the thought of being able to relieve her father and step-mother of the burden of her maintenance; for the fact that she was a burden had not been hidden from her. They had been kind; they had given her to eat and to drink of their best, and had admired her talents and accomplishments; but they had let her know at the same time that she was a failure, and that her future was a dark problem still far from solution—a problem which troubled them in the silent watches of the night. Nor did they forget to remind her from time to time that by her imprudence—pardonable

although that imprudence might be—she had forfeited six months' board and lodging, together with those educational advantages the Captain's fifty pounds had been intended to purchase for her. These facts had been reiterated, not altogether unkindly, but in a manner that made life intolerable; and she felt that were she to continue at Les Fontaines for the natural term of her existence, the same theme would still furnish the subject for parental harpings.

'Father,' she said, going behind Captain Palliser's chair, as he smoked his after-breakfast cigar, and read yesterday's *Times*, 'I want you to read this letter. It is a foolish schoolgirl letter, perhaps; but it will show you that my friends are not going to discard me on account of Miss Pew.'

The Captain laid down his paper, and slowly made his way through Bessie's lengthy epistle, which, although prettily written, with a good deal of grace in the slopes and curves of the penmanship, gave him considerable trouble to decipher. It was only when he had discovered that all the B's looked like H's, and that all the G's were K's, and all the

L's S's, and had, as it were, made a system for himself, that he was able to get on comfortably.

'Bless my soul,' he murmured, 'why cannot girls write legibly?'

'It is the real Mauleverer hand, papa, and is generally thought very pretty,' said Ida.

'Pretty, yes; you might have a zigzag pattern over the paper that would be just as pretty. One wants to be able to read a letter. This is almost as bad as Arabic. However, the girl seems a good warm-hearted creature, and very fond of you; and I should think you could not do better than accept her aunt's offer. It will be a beginning.'

'It is Hobson's choice, papa; but I am sure I shall be happy with Miss Wendover,' said Ida; and then she gave a faint sigh, and her heart sank at the thought of that Damoclesian sword always hanging over her head — the possibility of her husband claiming her.

Mrs. Palliser was much more rapturous when she heard the contents of the letter — much more interested in all details about Ida's future home. She wanted to know what Miss Wendover was

like—how many servants she kept—whether carriage or no carriage—what kind of a house she lived in, and how it was furnished.

'You will be quite a grand lady,' she said, with a touch of envy, when Ida had described the cosy red-brick cottage, the verandahed drawing-room and conservatory added by Miss Wendover, the pair of cobs which that lady drove, the large well-kept gardens; 'you will look down upon us with our poor ways, and this house, in which all the rooms smell of whitewash.'

'No, indeed, mamma, I shall always think of you with affection; for you have been very kind to me, although I know I have been a burden.'

'Everything is a burden when one is poor,' sighed her stepmother; 'even one extra in the washing-bills makes a difference; and we shall feel it awfully when Vernon grows up. Boys are so extravagant; and one cannot talk to them as one can to girls.'

'But I hope you will be better off then, mamma.'

'My dear, you might as well hope we should be dukes and duchesses. What chance is there

of any improvement? Your poor papa has no idea of earning money. I'm sure I have said to him, often and often, "Reginald, do *something.* Write for the magazines! Surely you can do *that.* Other men in your position do it." "Yes," he growled, "and that's why the magazines are so stupid." No, Ida, your father's circumstances will never improve; and when the time comes for giving Vernon a proper education we shall be paupers.'

'Poor papa!' sighed Ida; 'I am afraid he is not strong enough to make any great effort.'

'He has given way, my dear, that is the root of it all. We shall never be better off, unless those two healthy, broad-shouldered young men were to go and get themselves swallowed up by an earthquake; and that is rather too much for anyone to expect.'

'What young men?' asked Ida, absently.

'Your two cousins.'

'Oh, Sir Vernon and his brother. No, I don't suppose they will die to oblige us poor creatures.'

'They went up the what's-its-name Horn, in Switzerland,' said Mrs. Palliser, plaintively. 'It made my blood run cold to hear them talk about it. "By Jove, Peter, I thought it was all over with you," said Sir Vernon, when he told us how foolhardy his brother had been. But you see they got to the bottom all safe and sound, though ever so many people have been killed on that very mountain.'

'I'm glad they did, mamma. We may want their money very badly, but we are not murderers, even in thought.'

'God forbid,' sighed the little woman. 'They are fine grown gentlemanly young men, too. Sir Vernon gave my Vernie a sovereign, and promised him a pony next year; but, good gracious, how could we afford to keep a pony, even if we had a stable? "You had better make it the other kind of pony," says your father, and then they all burst out laughing.'

'So little makes a man laugh,' said Ida, somewhat contemptuously. That picture of her father making sport of his poverty irritated her.

'Well, dear mamma,' she said presently, moved by one of those generous impulses which were a part of her frank unwise nature, 'if ever I can earn a hundred a year—and there are many governesses who get as much—you shall have fifty to help pay Vernon's schooling.'

'You are a dear generous 'arted girl,' exclaimed the step-mother, and the two women kissed again with tears, an operation which they usually performed in the hour of domestic trouble.

Miss Wendover's letter came next day, a hearty, frank, affectionate letter, offering a home that was really meant to be like home, and a salary of forty pounds a year, 'just to buy your gowns,' Miss Wendover said. 'I know it is not sufficient remuneration for such accomplishments as yours, but I want *you* rather than your accomplishments, and I am not rich enough to give as much as you are worth. But you will, at least, stave off the drudgery of a governess's life till you are older, and better able to cope with domineering mothers and insolent pupils.'

Such a salary was a long way off that hundred per annum which Ida had set before her eyes as the golden goal to be gained by laborious pianoforte athletics and patient struggles with the profundities of German grammar; but, as Captain Palliser said, it was a beginning; and Ida was very glad so to begin. She wrote to Miss Wendover gratefully accepting her offer, and in a very humble spirit.

'I fear it is pity that prompts your kind offer,' she wrote, 'and that you take me because you know I left Mauleverer Manor in disgrace, and that nobody else would have me. I am a bad penny. That is what my father called me when I came home to him. And now I am to go back to Kingthorpe as a bad penny. But, please God, I will try to prove to you that I am not altogether worthless; and, whatever may happen, I shall love you and be grateful to you till the end of my life.'

'As you are so kind as to say I may come as soon as I like, I shall be with you on the day after you receive this letter.'

Ida's preparation for departure were not elaborate. Her scanty wardrobe had been put in the neatest possible order. A few hours sufficed for packing trunk and bonnet-box. On the last afternoon Mrs. Palliser came to her highly elated, and proposed a walk to Dieppe, and a drive home in the diligence which left the Market Place at five o'clock.

'I am going to give you a new hat,' she said, triumphantly. 'You must have a new hat.'

'But, dear mamma, I know you can't afford it.'

'I *will* afford it, Ida. You will have to go to church at Kingthorpe'—Mrs. Palliser regarded church-going as an oppressive condition of prosperous respectability. One of the few privileges of being hard up and quite out of society was that one need not go to church—'and I should like you to appear like a lady. You owe it to your pa and I. A hat you must 'ave. I can pay for it out of the housekeeping money, and your pa will never know the difference.'

'No, mamma, but you and Vernon will have

to pinch for it,' said Ida, knowing that there was positively no margin to that household's narrow means of existence.

'A little pinching won't hurt us. Vernie is as bilious as he can be; he eats too many compots and little fours. I shall keep him to plain bread and butter for a bit, and it will do him a world of good. There's no use talking, Ida, I mean you to 'ave a 'at; and if you won't come and choose it I must choose it myself,' concluded the little woman, dropping more aspirates as she grew more excited.

So mother and daughter walked to Dieppe in the dull November afternoon, Vernon trudging sturdily by his sister's side. They bought the hat, a gray felt with partridge plumage, which became Ida's rich dark bloom to perfection; and then they went to the Cathedral, and knelt in the dusky aisle, and heard the solemn melody of the organ, and the subdued voices of the choir, in the plaintive music of Vesper Psalms, monotonous somewhat, but with a sweet soothing influence, music that inspired gentle thoughts.

Then they went back to the Market-Place, and were in time to get good places on the *banquette* of the diligence, before the big white Norman horses trotted and ambled noisily along the stony street.

Ida left Dieppe late on the following evening, by the same steamer that had brought her from Newhaven. The British stewardess recognized her.

'Why, you was only across the other day, miss,' she said; 'what a gad-about you must be.'

She arrived in London by ten o'clock next morning, and left Waterloo at a quarter-past eleven, reaching Winchester early in the day. How different were her feelings this time, as the train wound slowly over those chalky hills! how full of care was her soul! And yet she was no longer a visitor going among strangers—this time she went to an assured home, she was to be received among friends. But the knowledge that her liberty was forfeited for ever, that she was a free-agent only on sufferance, made her grave and

depressed. Never again could she feel as glad and frank a creature as she had been in the golden prime of the summer that was gone, when she and Bessie and Urania Rylance came by this same railway, over those green English hill-sides, to the city that was once the chief seat of England's power and splendour.

A young man in a plain gray livery and irreproachable top-boots stood contemplatively regarding the train as it came into the station. He touched his hat at sight of Miss Palliser, and she remembered him as Miss Wendover's groom.

'Any luggage, ma'am?' he asked, as she alighted; as if it were as likely as not that she had come without any.

'There is one box, Needham. That is all besides these things.'

Her bonnet-box—frail ark of woman's pride—was in the carriage, with a wrap and an umbrella, and her dressing bag.

'All right, ma'am. If you'll show me which it is I'll tell the porter to bring it. I've got the cobs outside.'

'Oh, I am so sorry,—how good of Miss Wendover!'

'They wanted exercise, 'um. 'They was a bit above themselves, and the drive has done 'em good.'

Miss Wendover's cherished brown cobs, animals which in the eyes of Kingthorpe were almost as sacred as that Egyptian beast whose profane slaughter was more deeply felt than the nation's ruin—to think that these exalted brutes should have been sent to fetch that debased creature, a salaried companion. But then Aunt Betsy was never like anyone else.

Needham took the cobs across the hills at a pace which he would have highly disapproved in any other driver. Had Miss Wendover so driven them, he would have declared she was running them off their legs. But in his own hands, Brimstone and Treacle—so called to mark their difference of disposition—could come to no harm. 'They wanted it,' he told Miss Palliser, when she remarked upon their magnificent pace, 'they never got half work enough.'

The hills looked lovely, even in this wintry season—yew trees and grass gave no token of November's gloom. The sky was bright and blue, a faint mist hung like a veil over the city in the valley, the low Norman tower of the cathedral, the winding river, and flat fertile meadows—a vision very soon left far in the rear of Brimstone and Treacle.

'How handsome they look!' said Ida, admiring their strong bold crests, like war-horses in a Ninevite picture, their shining black-brown coats. 'Is Brimstone such a very vicious horse?'

'Vicious, mum? no, not a bit of vice about him,' answered Needham promptly, 'but he's a rare difficult horse to groom. There ain't none but me as dares touch him. I let the boy try it once, and I found the poor lad half an hour afterwards standing in the middle of the big loose box like a statter, while Brimstone raced round him as hard as he could go, just like one of them circus horses. The boy dursn't stir. If he'd moved a limb Brimstone 'ud have 'molished him.'

'What an awful horse! But isn't that viciousness?'

'Lor', no mum. That ain't vice,' answered the groom, smiling amusedly at the lady's ignorance. 'Vice is crib-biting, or jibbing, or boring, or summat o' that kind. Brimstone is a game hoss, and he's got a bit of a temper, but he ain't got no vice.'

Here was Kingthorpe, looking almost as pretty as it had looked when she gazed upon it with tearful eyes in her sad farewell at the close of summer. The big forest trees were bare, but there were flowers in all the cottage gardens, even late lingering roses on southern walls, and the clipped yew-tree abominations — dumb-waiters, peacocks, and other monstrosities — were in their pride of winter beauty. The ducks were swimming gaily in the village pond, and the village inn was still glorious with red geraniums, in redder pots. The Knoll stood out grandly above all other dwellings— the beds full of chrysanthemums, and a bank of big scarlet geraniums on each side of the hall door.

It seemed strange to be driven swiftly past

the familiar carriage-drive, and round into the lane leading to Miss Wendover's cottage. It was only an accommodation lane—or a back-out lane, as the boys called it, since no two carriages could pass each other in that narrow channel — and in bad weather the approach to the Homestead was far from agreeable. A carriage and horses had been known to stick there, with wheels hopelessly embedded in the clay, while Miss Wendover's guests picked their footsteps through the mud.

But the Homestead, when attained, was such a delightful house, that one forgot all impediments in the way thither. The red brick front—old red brick, be it noted, which has a brightness and purity of colour never retained for above a twelve-month by the red brick of to-day—glowing, athwart its surrounding greenery, like the warm welcome of a friend; the exquisite neatness of the garden, where every flower that could be coaxed into growing in the open air bloomed in perfection; the spick-and-span brightness of the windows; the elegant order that prevailed within, from cellar to garret; the old, carefully-chosen furniture, which

had for the most part been collected from other old-world homesteads; the artistic colouring of draperies and carpets—all combined to make Miss Wendover's house delightful.

'My house had need be orderly,' she said, when her friends waxed rapturous; 'I have so little else to think about.'

Yet the sick and poor, within a radius of ten miles, might have testified that Miss Wendover had thought and care for all who needed them, and that she devoted the larger half of her life to other people's interests.

It was a clear balmy day, one of those lovely autumn days which hang upon the edge of winter, and Miss Wendover was pacing her garden walks bare-headed, armed with gardening scissors and formidable brown leather gauntlets, nipping a leaf here, or a withered rose-bud there, with eyes whose eagle glance not so much as an aphis could escape. From the slope of her lawn Aunt Betsy saw the cobs turn into the lane, and she was standing at the gate to welcome the traveller when the carriage drew up.

There was no carriage-drive on this side of the house, only a lawn with a world of flower-beds. Those visitors who wanted to enter in a ceremonious manner had to drive round by shrubbery and orchard to the back, where there were an old oak door and an entrance-hall. On this garden front there were only glass doors and long French windows, verandahs, and sunny parlours, opening one out of another.

'How do you do, my dear?' said the spinster heartily, as Ida alighted; 'I am very glad to see you. 'Why, how bright and blooming you look —not a bit like a sea-sick traveller.'

'Dear Miss Wendover, I ought to look bright when I am so glad to come to you; and as to the other thing, I am never sea-sick.'

'What a splendid girl! That unhappy little Bessie can't cross to the Wight without being a martyr. But, Ida, I am not going to be called Miss Wendover. Only bishops and county magnates, and people of that kind call me by that name. To you I am to be Aunt Betsy, as I am to the children at The Knoll.'

'Is not that putting me too much on a level——'

'With my own flesh and blood? Nonsense! I mean you to be as my own flesh and blood. I could not bear to have any one about me who was not.'

'You are too good,' faltered Ida. 'How can I ever repay you?'

'You have only to be happy. It is your nature to be frank and truthful, so I will say nothing about that.'

Ida blushed deepest scarlet. Frank and truthful—she—whose very name was a lie! And yet there could be no wrong done to Miss Wendover, she told herself, by her suppression of the truth. It was a suppression that concerned only Brian Walford and herself. No one else could have any interest in the matter.

Betsy Wendover herself led the way to the bed-chamber that had been prepared for the new inmate. It was a dear old room, not spacious, but provided with two most capacious closets, in each of which a small gang of burglars could have

hidden—dear old closets, with odd little corner cupboards inside them, and a most elaborate system of shelves. One closet had a little swing window at the top for ventilation, and this, Miss Wendover told Ida, was generally taken for a haunted corner, as the ventilating window gave utterance to unearthly noises in the dead watches of the night, and sometimes gave entrance to a stray cat from adjacent tiles. A cat less agile than the rest of his species had been known to entangle himself in the little swing window, and to hang there all the night, sending forth unearthly caterwaulings, to the unspeakable terror of Miss Wendover's guest, unfamiliar with the mechanism of the room, and wondering what breed of Hampshire demon or afrit was thus making night hideous.

There was a painted wooden dado halfway up the wall, and a florid rose and butterfly paper above it. There was a neat little brass bedstead on one side of the room, a tall Chippendale chest of drawers, with writing-table and pigeon-holes on the other side; the dearest, oldest dressing-table and shield-shaped glass in front of the broad latticed

window; while in another window there was a cushioned seat, such as Mariana of the Moated Grange sat upon when she looked across the fens and bewailed her dead-and-gone joys. There were old cups and saucers on the high, narrow chimney-piece, below which a cosy fire burned in a little old basket grate. Altogether the room was the picture of homely comfort.

'Oh, what a lovely room!' cried Ida, inwardly contrasting this cheery chamber with that white-washed den at Les Fontaines, with its tawdry mahogany and brass fittings, its florid six feet of carpet on a deal floor stained brown, its alabaster clock and tin candelabra—a cheap caricature of Parisian elegance.

'I'm glad you like it, my dear,' answered Miss Wendover. 'Bessie said it would suit you; and all I ask you is to keep it tidy. I hope I am not a tyrant; but I am an old maid. Of course, I shall never pry into your room; but I warn you that I have an eye which takes in everything at a flash; and if I happen to go past when your door is open, and see a bonnet and shawl on your

bed, or a gown sprawling on your sofa, my teeth will be set on edge for the next half hour.'

'Dear Miss Wen——, dear Aunt Betsy,' said Ida, corrected by a frown, 'I hope you will come into my room every day, and give me a good scolding, if it is not exactly as you like. Everything in this house looks lovely. I want to learn your nice neat ways.'

'Well, my love, you might learn something worse,' replied Miss Wendover, with innocent pride. 'And now come down to luncheon, I kept it back on purpose for you, and I am sure you must be starving.'

The luncheon was excellent, served with a tranquil perfection only to be attained by careful training; and yet Miss Wendover's youthful butler three years ago had been a bird boy; while her rosy-cheeked parlour-maid was only eighteen, and had escaped but two years from the primitive habits of cottage life. Aunt Betsy had a genius for training young servants.

'You had better unpack your boxes directly after luncheon,' said Miss Wendover, when Ida

had eaten with very good appetite, 'and arrange your things in your drawers. That will take you an hour or so, I suppose—say till five o'clock, when Bessie is coming over to afternoon tea.'

'Oh, I am so glad. I am longing to see Bessie. Is she as lovable and pretty as ever?'

'Well, yes,' replied Aunt Betsy, with a critical air; 'I think she has rather improved. She is plump enough still, in all conscience, but not quite so stumpy as she was last summer. Her figure is a little less like a barrel.'

'I hope she was very much admired at Bournemouth.'

'Yes, strange to say, she had a good many admirers,' answered Miss Wendover coolly. She made a point of never being enthusiastic about her relations. 'She had always partners at the dances, I am told, even when there was a paucity of dancing men; and she was considered rather remarkable at lawn tennis. No doubt she will tell you all about it this afternoon. I have some work to do in the village, and I shall leave you two girls together.'

This was a delicacy which touched Ida. She was very anxious to see Bessie, and to talk to her as they could only talk when they were alone. She wanted to know her faithful friend's motive for that cruel deception about Brian Walford. That the frank, tender-hearted Bessie could have so deceived her from any unworthy motive was impossible.

Five o'clock struck, and Ida was sitting alone in the drawing-room, waiting to receive her friend, just as if she were the daughter of the house, instead of a salaried dependent. The pretty carved Indian tea-table—a gem in Bombay blackwood—was wheeled in front of the fire-place, which was old, as regarded the high wooden mantel-piece and capacious breadth of the hearth, but essentially new in its glittering tiles and dainty brass fire-irons.

The clock had hardly finished striking when Bessie bounced into the room, rosy and smiling, in sealskin jacket and toque.

'Oh, you darling! isn't this lovely?' she exclaimed, hugging Ida. 'You are to live here for ever and ever, and never, never, never to leave

us again, and never to marry, unless you marry one of the Brians. Don't shudder like that, pet, they are both nice! And I'm sure you like Brian Walford, though, perhaps, not quite so much as he liked you. You do like him now, don't you, darling?' urged Bess.

Ida had withdrawn from her embrace, and was seated before the low Bombay table, occupied with the tea-pot. There was no light but the fire and one shaded lamp on a distant table. The curtains were not yet drawn, and white mists were rising in the garden outside, like a sea.

'Bessie,' Ida began, gravely, as her old schoolfellow sat on a low stool in front of the fire, 'how could you deceive me like that? What could put such a thing in your head—*you*, so frank, so open?'

'I am sure I hardly know,' answered Bess, innocently. 'It was my birthday, don't you know, and we were all wild. Perhaps the champagne had something to do with it, though I didn't take any. But that sort of excitement com-

municates itself; and running up and down hill gets into one's head. We all thought it would be such fun to pass off penniless B. W. for his wealthy cousin—and just to see how you liked him, with that extra advantage. But there was no harm in it, was there, dear? Of course, he told you afterwards, when you saw him at Mauleverer?

'Yes, he told me—afterwards.'

'Naturally; and having begun to like him as the rich Brian, you didn't leave off liking him because of his poverty—did you, darling? The man himself was the same.'

Ida was silent, remembering how, with the revelation of the fraud that had been practised upon her, the very man himself had seemed to undergo a transformation—as if a disguise, altering his every characteristic, had been suddenly flung aside.

She did not answer Bessie's question, but, looking down at her with grave, searching eyes, she said,—

'Dear Bessie, it was a very foolish jest. I know it is not in your nature to mean unkindly to anyone, least of all to me, to whom you have

been an angel of light; but all practical jokes of that kind are liable to inflict pain and humiliation upon the victim—however innocently meant. Whose idea was it, Bess? Not yours, I think?'

'No; it was Urania who proposed it. She said it would be such fun.'

'Miss Rylance is not usually so—funny.'

'No; but she was particularly jolly that day, don't you remember? in positively boisterous spirits—for her.'

'And the outcome of her amiability was this suggestion?'

'Yes, darling. She had noticed that you had a kind of romantic fancy about Brian of the Abbey—that you had idealised his image, as it were—and set him up as a kind of demi-god. Not because of his wealth, darling—don't suppose that we supposed that—but on account of that dear old Abbey and its romantic associations, which gave a charm to the owner. And so she said what fun it would be to pass off Brian Walford as his cousin, and see if you fell in love with him. "I know she is ready to lay her heart at the feet

of the owner of the Abbey," Urania said; and I thought it would be too delicious if you were to fall in love with Brian Walford, who could not help falling in love with you, for of course it would end in your marrying him, and his getting on splendidly at the bar; for, with his talents, he must do well. He only wants a motive for industry. And then you would be our very own cousin! I hope it wasn't a very wicked idea, Ida, and that you will find it in your heart to forgive me,' pleaded Bess, kneeling by her friend's chair, with clasped hands upon Ida's knees, and sweet, half-tearful face looking up.

'My darling, I have never been angry with you,' answered Ida, clasping the girl to her heart, with a stifled sob. 'But I don't think Miss Rylance meant so kindly. Her idea sprang from a malevolent heart. She wanted to humiliate me—to drag my most sordid characteristics into the light of day—to make me more abject than poverty had made me already. That was the motive of her joke.'

'Never mind her motive, dear. All I am in-

terested in is your opinion of Brian. I hope he behaved nicely at Mauleverer.'

'Very nicely.'

'Cobb says that Fraulein positively raves about him—declares he is quite the most gentlemanly young man she ever saw—a godly young man she called him, in her funny English. And, she says, that he was madly in love with you. Of course he made you an offer?'

'How could he do that when I was always with the Fraulein?'

'Oh, nonsense. Brian is not the kind of young man to be kept at bay by a mild nonentity like the Fraulein. He told me before he left that he was desperately in love with you, and that he meant to win you for his wife. I asked him how he intended to keep a wife, and he said he should write for the magazines, and do theatrical criticisms for the newspapers, till briefs began to drop in. He was determined to win you if you were to be won. So I feel sure that he made you an offer, unless, indeed, that horrid old Pew spoiled all by her venomous conduct.'

'That is it, dear. Miss Pew brought matters to an abrupt close.'

'And you are not engaged to Brian?' said Bess, dolefully.

'No.'

'And he didn't follow you to Dieppe?'

'No.'

'Then he is not half so fine a fellow as I thought him.'

'Suppose, Bessie, that after a little mild flirtation, with Fraulein Wolf for an audience, we both discovered that our liking for each other was of the very coolest order, and that it was wiser to let the acquaintance end?'

'You might feel that, but I would never believe it of Brian. Why, he raved about you; he was passionately in love. He told me there was no sacrifice he would not make to call you his wife.'

'He had so much to sacrifice,' said Ida, with a cynical air.

'Don't be unkind, Ida. Of course I know that he has his fortune to make; but he is so thoroughly nice—so full of fun.'

'Did you ever know him do anything good or great, anything worth being remembered—anything that proved the depth and nobility of his nature?' asked Ida, earnestly.

'Good gracious! no, not that I can remember. He is always nice, and amusing. He doesn't like carrying a basket, or skates, and things; but of course, where there are younger boys one couldn't expect him to do that; and he hates plain girls and old women; but I suppose that is natural, for even father does it, in his secret soul, though he is always so utterly sweet to the poor things. But I am sure Brian Walford has a tender heart, because he is so fond of kittens.'

'I didn't mean to insinuate that he was a modern Domitian,' answered Ida, smiling at Bessie's childish earnestness. 'What I mean is that there is no depth in his nature, no nobility in his character. He is shallow, and, I fear, selfish. But, Bessie, my pet, I am going to ask you a favour.'

'Ask away,' cried Bessie, cheerfully; 'I can't give you the moon, but anything which I really do possess is yours this instant.'

'Don't let us ever talk of Brian Walford. I can never get over the feeling of humiliation which Miss Rylance's practical joke caused me; and my only chance of forgetting it is to forget your cousin's existence.'

'Oh, but he will come to The Knoll, I hope, at Christmas, and then you will think better of him.'

'If he should come I—I hope I shall not see him.'

'Has he offended you so deeply?'

'Don't let us talk about him, Bess. Tell me all about your Bournemouth triumphs. I hear you were the belle of the place.'

'Then you have heard a most egregious fib. There were dozens of girls with nineteen-inch waists, before whom I felt myself a monster of dumpiness. But I got on pretty well. I don't pretend to be a good dancer, but I can generally adapt myself to the badness of other people's steps, and that goes for something.'

And now having got away from all painful subjects, Bessie rattled on at a tremendous pace,

describing girls and gowns, and partners, and tennis tournaments, and yachting excursions, all in a breath, as she sat in front of the fire sipping her tea, and devouring a particular kind of buttered bun for which Miss Wendover's cook was famous.

'Aunt Betsy's tea is always nicer than any one else's; and so are her buns and her butter; in fact everything in this house is nicer than it is anywhere else,' said Bessie, pausing in her reminiscences. 'You are in clover here, Ida.'

'Thanks to your goodness, Bess.'

'To mine? But I have positively nothing to do with it.'

'Yes, you have. It is from the wish to please her warm-hearted little niece that Miss Wendover has been so good to me.'

'But if you had been plain or stupid she would have only been kind to you at a distance. Aunt Betsy has her idiosyncrasies, and one of them is a liking for beauty in individuals, as well as in chairs and tables and cups and saucers. You will see that all her servants are

pretty. She picks them for their good looks, I believe, and trains them afterwards. She would not have so much as a bad-looking stable boy.'

'Hard upon ugliness to be shut out of this paradise,' said Ida.

'Oh, but she finds places for the ugly boys and girls, with people whose teeth are not so easily set on edge, she says herself. And now I must be off, to change my frock for dinner. You know the back way to The Knoll, across the fields to the little door in the kitchen-garden. You will always come that way, of course. When are you coming to see us? To-morrow?'

'You forget that my time is not my own. I will come whenever Miss Wendover can best spare me.'

'Oh, you will have plenty of spare time, I am sure.'

'I hope not too much, or I shall be too sharply reminded that Miss Wendover has taken me out of charity.'

'Charity fiddlestick! A prize-winner like you!

And now good-bye, pet, or I shall be late for dinner, which offends the Colonel beyond measure.'

Bessie scampered off, Ida following her to the glass door, only in time to see her running across the lawn as fast as her feet could carry her. It was characteristic of Bessie to cut everything very fine in the way of time.

CHAPTER II.

THE SWORD OF DAMOCLES.

And now began for Ida a life of exceeding peacefulness, comfort, happiness even; for how could a girl fail to be happy among people who were so friendly and kind, who so thoroughly respected her, and so warmly admired her for gifts altogether independent of fortune—who never, by word or look, reminded her that she was in anywise of less importance than themselves?

Nor had the girl any cause to fear that she was a useless member of Miss Wendover's household. That lady found plenty of occupation for her young companion—varied and pleasant duties, which made the days seem too short, and the leisure of the long winter evenings an agreeable relief from the busy hours of daylight.

That exquisite neatness which gave such a

charm to Miss Wendover's house was not attained without labour. The polished surface of the old Chippendale bureaus, the inlaid Sheraton chairs and tables, could only be maintained by daily care. A housemaid's perfunctory dusting was not sufficient here; and Miss Wendover, gloved and aproned, and armed with leathers and brushes, gave at least half an hour every morning to the care of her old furniture. Another half hour was devoted to china; and the floral arrangements indoors, even in this wintry season, occupied half an hour more. This was all active work, about which Aunt Betsy and Ida went merrily, talking tremendously as they polished and dusted, and upon all possible subjects, for Miss Wendover's lonely evenings had enabled her to read almost as much as Southey, and she delighted in telling Ida the curious out-of-the-way facts that were stored up in her memory.

Sometimes there was an hour or so given to culinary matters—new dishes, new kickshaws, *hors d'œuvres*, savouries—to be taught the young, teachable cook-maid; for whenever Miss Wendover

went to a great dinner, her eagle eye was on the alert to discover some modern improvement in the dishes or the table arrangements.

Then there was gardening, which absorbed a good deal of time in fine weather; for Aunt Betsy held that no gardener, however honestly inclined, would long feel interested in a garden to which its owner was indifferent. Miss Wendover knew every flower that grew—could bud, and graft, and pot, and prune, and do everything that her youthful gardeners could do, besides being ever so much more learned in the science of gardening.

Then there were inspections of piggery and poultry-yard, medicines and particular foods to be prepared for the poultry, hospitals to be established and looked after in odd corners of the orchard, and the propagation of species to be carried on by mechanical contrivances.

On wet days there was art needlework, for which Miss Wendover had what artists would call a great deal of feeling, without being very skilful as an executant. Under her direction, Ida began a mauresque border for a tawny plush

curtain, which was to be a triumph of art when completed, and which was full of interest in progress. She worked at this of an evening, while Miss Wendover, who had a fine full voice, and a perfect enunciation, read aloud to her. Then, when Miss Wendover was tired, Ida went to the piano and played for an hour or so, while the elder lady gave herself up to rare idleness and dreamy thought.

These were home duties only. The two ladies had occupations abroad of a more exacting nature. Miss Wendover until now had given two botany lessons, and one physical science lesson every week in the village school. The botany lessons she now handed over to Ida, whom she coached for that purpose. Summer or winter these lessons were always given out of doors, in the course of an hour's ramble in field, lane, or wood. Then Miss Wendover had a weekly class for domestic economy, a class attended by all the most promising girls, from thirteen years old upwards, within five miles. This class was held in the kitchen, or housekeeper's room at the Homestead; and many were the savoury messes of broth or soup, cheap stews and

meat puddings, and the jellies and custards compounded at these lessons, to be sent off next day to the sick poor upon Miss Wendover's list.

Then there was house to house visiting all over the widely-scattered parish, much talk with gaffers and goodies, in all of which Ida assisted. She would have hated the work had Miss Wendover been a person of the Pardiggle stamp; but as love was the governing principle of all Aunt Betsy's work, her presence was welcome as sunshine or balmy air; so welcome that her sharpest lectures (and she could lecture when there was need) were received with meekness and even gratitude. In these visits Ida learned to know a great deal about the ways and manners of the agricultural poor, all the weakness and all the nobility of the rural nature.

Every Saturday or half-holiday at the village school—blessed respite which gave the hard-worked mistress time to mend her clothes, and make herself bright and trim for Sunday, and opened for the master brilliant possibilities in the way of a jaunt to Romsey or Winchester—Miss Wendover gave

a dinner to all the schoolchildren under twelve. She had taken up Victor Hugo's theory that a substantial meat dinner, even on one day out of seven, will do much to build up the youthful constitution and to prevent scrofulous diseases. Moved by these considerations, she had fitted up a disused barn as a rustic dining-hall, the walls plastered and whitewashed, or buff-washed, the massive cross timbers painted a dark red, a long deal table and a few forms the only furniture. Here, every Saturday, at half-past one o'clock, she provided a savoury meat dinner; and very strong must be that temptation or that necessity which would induce Aunt Betsy to abandon her duties as hostess at this weekly feast. It was she who said grace before and after meat—save when some suckling parson was admitted to the meal; it was she who surveyed and improved the manners of her guests by sarcastic hints or friendly admonitions; and it was she who furnished intellectual entertainment in the shape of anecdote, historical story, or excruciating conundrum.

Ida was allowed to assist at these banquets,

and there was nothing in her new life which she enjoyed more than the sight of all those glad young faces round the board, or the sound of that frank, rustic laughter. Some there were naturally of a bovine dulness, in whom even Miss Wendover could not awaken a ray of intelligence; but these were few. The generality of the children were far above the average rustic in brightness of intellect, and this superiority might fairly be ascribed to Aunt Betsy's influence.

A fortnight before Christmas, by which time Ida had been at the Homestead more than a month, Miss Wendover suggested a drive to Winchester, and before starting she handed Ida a ten-pound note. 'You may want some additional finery for Christmas' she said kindly. 'Girls generally do. So you may as well buy it to-day.'

'But, dear Aunt Betsy, I have only been with you a month.'

'Never mind that, my dear. We will not be particular as to quarter-days. When I think you want money I shall give it to you, and we can make up our accounts at the end of the year.'

'You are ever so much too good to me,' said Ida, with a loving look that said a good deal more than words.

There was a light frost that whitened the hills, and the keen freshness of the air stimulated Brimstone to conduct of a somewhat riotous character, but Miss Wendover's firm hand held his spirits in check. Treacle was a sagacious beast, who never did more work than he was absolutely obliged to do, and who allowed Brimstone to drag the phaeton while he trotted complacently on the other side of the pole. But Miss Wendover would stand no nonsense, even from the amiable Treacle. She sent the pair across the hills at a splendid pace, and drove them under the old archway and down the stony street with a style which won the admiration of every experienced eye.

They drew up at the chief draper's of the town; and here Miss Wendover retired to hold a solemn conference with the head milliner, a judicious and accomplished person who made Aunt Betsy's gowns and bonnets—all of a solid and

substantial architecture, as if modelled on the adjacent cathedral. Ida, left alone amidst all the fascinations of the chief shop in a smart county town, and feeling herself a Crœsus, had much need of fortitude and coolness of temper. Happily she remembered what a little way that five-pound note had gone in preparing her for her summer visit to The Knoll, and this brought wisdom. Before spending sixpence upon herself she bought a gown—an olive merino gown, and velvet to trim it withal—for her step-mother.

'I don't think she gets a new gown much oftener than I do,' she thought; 'and even if this costs four or five shillings for carriage it will be worth the money, as a Christmas surprise.'

The gown left only trifling change out of two sovereigns, so that by the time Ida had bought herself a dark brown cloth jacket and a brown cashmere gown there were only four sovereigns left out of the ten. She spent one of these upon some pale pink cashmere for an evening dress, and half a sovereign on gloves, as she knew Miss

Wendover liked to see people neatly gloved. Ten shillings more were spent upon calico, and another sovereign went by-and-by at the boot-maker's, leaving the damsel with just twenty shillings out of her quarter's wage; but as the need of pocket-money at Kingthorpe, except for the Sunday offertory, was *nil*, she felt herself passing rich in the possession of that last remaining sovereign. She would have liked to spend it all upon Christmas gifts for her young friends at The Knoll; but this fond wish she relinquished with a sigh. Paupers could not be givers of gifts. Whatever she gave must be the fruit of her own labour—some delicate piece of handiwork made out of cheap materials.

'They are all too good to think meanly of me because I can only show my gratitude in words,' she told herself.

As Christmas drew near Ida listened anxiously for any allusion to Brian Walford as a probable visitor: and to her infinite relief, just three days before the festival, she heard that he was not coming. He had been invited, and he had left

his young cousins in suspense as to his intentions till the last moment, and then had written to say that he had accepted an invitation to Norfolk, where there would be shooting, and a probability of a stag-hunt on foot.

'Which I call horridly mean of him,' protested Horatio, who had come across the fields expressly to announce this fact to Ida. 'Why can't he come and shoot here? I don't mean to say that there is anything particular to shoot, but he and I could go out together and try our luck. Our hills are splendid for hares.'

'Do you mean that there are plenty of hares?' inquired Ida.

'No, not exactly that. But it would be capital ground for them, don't you know, if there were any.'

'And where is your other cousin Brian?' asked Ida, merely for the sake of conversation.

All interest, all idle dreaming about the unknown Brian was over with her since the fatal mistake which had marred her life. She could not conceive that anything save evil could

ever arise to her henceforward out of that hated name.

'Oh, he is in Sweden, or Turkey, or Russia, or somewhere,' replied Horatio, with a disgusted air; 'always on the move, instead of keeping up the Abbey in proper style, and cultivating his cousins. A man with such an income is bound in duty to his fellow-creatures to keep a pack of foxhounds. What else was he sent into the world for, I should like to know.'

'Perhaps to cultivate the knowledge of his fellow-creatures in distant countries, and to improve his mind.'

'Rot!' exclaimed Horatio, who was not choice in his language. 'What does he want with mind? or to make a walking Murray or Baedeker of himself? Society requires him to lay out his money to the local advantage. Here we are, with no foxhounds nearer than the New Forest, when we ought to have a pack at our door.'

Ida could not enter into the keen sense of deprivation caused by a dearth of foxhounds, so

she went on quietly with her work, shading the wing of the inevitable swallow flitting across the inevitable bulrushes which formed the design for a piano back.

Presently Bessie came bouncing in, her seal-skin flung on anyhow, and the most disreputable thing in hats perched sideways on her bright brown curls.

'Mother is going to let us have a dance,' she burst forth breathlessly, 'on Twelfth Night. Won't that be too jolly? A regular party, don't you know, with a crumb-cloth, and a pianiste from Winchester, and perhaps a cornet. It's only another guinea, and if father's in a good temper he's sure to say yes. You must come over to The Knoll every evening to practise your waltzing. We shall have nothing but round dances in the programme. I'll take care of that!'

'But if there are any matrons who like to have a romp in the Lancers or the Caledonians, ain't it rather a shame to leave them out in the cold?' suggested Horatio. 'You're so blessed selfish, Bess.'

'We are not going to have any matrons.

Mother will matronize the whole party. We are going to have the De Travers, and the Pococks, and the Ducies, and the Bullinghams over from Bournemouth.'

'And where the deuce are you going to put 'em?'

'Oh, we can put up at least twenty—on spare mattresses, don't you know, in the old nursery, and in the dressing-rooms and bath-room; and as for us, why of course, *we* can sleep anywhere.'

'Thank you,' replied Horatio; 'I hope you don't suppose I am going to turn out of my den, or to allow a pack of girls to ransack my drawers, and smoke my favourite pipe.'

'I don't suppose any decent-minded girl would consent to sleep in such a loathsome hole,' retorted Bessie. 'She would prefer a pillow and a rug on the landing.'

'My den is quite as tidy as that barrack of yours,' said the Wykamite, 'though I haven't yet risen to disfiguring my walls with kitchen plates and fourpenny fans. The cheap æsthetic is not my line.'

'Don't pretend to be cantankerous, Horatio,' said Ida, looking at him with the loveliest eyes, twinkling a little at his expense; 'we all know that you are brimming over with good humour. Perhaps Aunt Betsy will take in some of your visitors, Bess. I am sure they shall be welcome to my room, if I have to sleep in the poultry yard.'

'Happy thought,' cried Bessie; 'I'll sound the dear creature as to her views on the subject this very day.

Aunt Betsy was all goodness, and offered to accommodate half a dozen young ladies of neat and cleanly habits. She protested that she would have no candle-grease droppers or door-mat despisers in her house.

'The Homestead is the only toy I have,' she said, 'and I won't have it ill-used.'

So six irreproachable young women, the pride of careful mothers, were billeted on Miss Wendover, while the more Bohemian damsels were to revel in the improvised accommodation of The Knoll.

That particular Christmas-tide at Kingthorpe

was a time of innocent mirth and youthful happiness which might have banished black care, for the nonce, from the oldest, weariest breast. For Ida, still young and fresh, loving and lovable, the contagion of that youthful mirth was irresistible.

She forgot by how fine a hair hung the sword that dangled over her guilty head—or began to think that the hair was tough enough to hold good for ever. And what mattered the existence of the sword provided it was never to fall? Sometimes it seemed to her in the pure and perfect happiness of this calm rural home, this useful, innocent life, as if that ill-advised act of hers had never been acted — as if that autumn morning, that one half-hour in the modern Gothic church, still smelling of mortar and pitch-pine, set in flat fields, from which October mists were rising ghostlike, was no more than a troubled dream—a dream that she had dreamed and done with for ever. Could it be that such an hour —so dim, so shadowy to look back upon from the substantial footing of her present existence —was to give colour to all the rest of her life?

No, it was the dark dream of a troubled past, and she had nothing to do but to forget it as soon as possible.

Forgetfulness—or at least a temporary kind of forgetfulness—was tolerably easy while Brian Walford was civil enough to stay away from Kingthorpe ; but the problem of life would be difficult were he to appear in the midst of that cordial circle—difficult to impossibility.

'It is evident that he doesn't mean to come while I am here,' she told herself, 'and that at least is kind. But in that case I must not stay here too long. It is not fair that I should shut him out of his uncle's house. It is I who am the interloper.'

She thought with bitterest grief of any change from this peaceful life among friends who loved her, to service in the house of a stranger ; but her conscience recognized the necessity for such a change.

She had no right to squat upon the family of the man she had married—to exclude him from his rightful heritage, she who refused to

acknowledge his right as her husband. He had done her a deep wrong; he had deceived her cruelly; and she deemed that she had a right to repudiate a bond tainted by fraud; but she knew that she had no right to banish him from his family circle—to dwell, under false pretences, by the hearth of his kindred.

'I did wrong in coming here,' she thought; 'it was a mean thing to do. Yet how could I resist the temptation, when no other place offered, and when I knew I was such a burden at home?'

In the very midst of her happiness, therefore, there was always this corroding care, this remorseful sense of wrong doing. This present life of hers was all blissful, but it was bliss which could not, which must not, last. Yet what fortitude would be needed ere she could break this flowery bondage, loosen these dear fetters which love had laid upon her.

Once, during that jovial Christmas season, she hinted at a possible change in the future.

'What a happy day this has been!' she said, as she walked across the wintry fields with Miss

Wendover on the verge of midnight, after a Christmas dinner and a long evening of Christmas games at The Knoll, Needham marching in front of them with an unnecessary lantern, and all the stars of heaven shining in blue frosty brilliance above their heads, 'and what a happy home! I feel it is a privilege to have seen so much of it; and by-and-by, when I am among strangers——'

'What do you mean?' exclaimed Aunt Betsy, sharply; 'there is to be no such by-and-by; or, if there ever be such a time, it will be your making, not mine. You suit me capitally, and I mean to keep you as long as ever I can, without absolute selfishness. If an eligible husband should want to carry you off, I must let you go; but I will part with you to no one less than a husband —unless, indeed,' and here Betsy Wendover's voice took a colder and graver tone, 'unless you should want to better yourself, as the servants say, and get more money than I can afford to give you. I know your accomplishments are worth much more; but it is not everybody to whom you would be as their own flesh and blood.'

'Oh, Aunt Betsy, can you think that I should ever set money in the scale against your kindness—your infinite goodness to me?'

'When you talk of a change by-and-by, you set me thinking. Perhaps you are already beginning to tire of this rustic dulness.'

'No, no, no; I never was so happy in my life—never since I was a child playing about on board the ship that brought my mother and me to England. Everybody was kind to me, and made much of me. My mother and I adored each other; and I did not know that she was dying. Soon after we landed she grew dangerously ill, and lay for weeks in a darkened room, which I was not allowed to enter. It was a dreary, miserable time; a lonely, friendless child pining in a furnished lodging, with no one but a servant and a sick-nurse to speak to; and then one dark November morning, the black hearse and coaches came to the door, and I stood peeping behind a corner of the parlour blind, and saw my mother's coffin carried out of the house. No; from the time we left the ship till I came to

The Knoll I had never known what perfect happiness meant.'

'Surely you must have had some happy days with your father?' said Aunt Betsy.

'Very few. There was always a cloud. Papa is not the kind of man who can be cheerful under difficulties. Besides, I have seen so little of him, poor dear. He did not come home from India till I was thirteen, and then he fell in love with my step-mother and married her, and took her to France, where he fancies it is cheaper to live than in England. Yet I cannot help thinking there are corners of dear old England where he might find a prettier home and live quite as cheaply.'

'Of course, if he were a sensible man; but I gather from all you have told me that there is a gentlemanlike helplessness about him—as of a person who ought to have inherited a handsome income, and is out of his element as a struggler.'

'That is quite true,' answered Ida; 'my father was not born to wrestle with Fate.'

They were at the glass door which opened

into the morning room by this time. The room was steeped in rosy light—such a pretty room, with chintz curtains and chintz-covered easy-chairs, low, luxurious, inviting; the only ponderous piece of furniture an old Japanese cabinet, rich in gold work upon black lacquer. On the dainty little octagon table there was a large shallow brown glass vase full of Christmas roses; and there was an odour of violets from the celadon china jars on the chimney-piece. Aunt Betsy's favourite Persian cat, a marvel of fluffy whiteness, rose from the hearth to welcome them. It was a delightful picture of home life.

Miss Wendover seemed in no hurry to go to bed. She seated herself in the low arm-chair by the fire, and allowed the Persian to rub its white head and arch its back against her dark brocade skirt. No one within twenty miles of Winchester wore such brocades or such velvets as Miss Wendover's. They were supposed to be woven on purpose for her. Her gowns were gowns of the old school, and lasted for years, smelling of the sandal or camphor wood chests in which they

reposed for months at a stretch, yet, by virtue of some wonderful tact in the wearer, never looked dowdy or out of date.

'Now, said Miss Wendover, with a resolute air, 'let us understand each other, my dear Ida. I don't quite like what you said just now; and I want to hear for certain that you are satisfied with your life here.'

'I am utterly happy here, dear Aunt Betsy. Is that a sufficient answer? Only, when I came here, I felt that it was charity—an impulse of kindness for a friendless girl—that prompted you to offer me a home; that, in accepting your kindness, I had no right to become an encumbrance; that, having enjoyed your genial hospitality for a space, I ought to move on upon my journey, to go where I could be of more use.'

'You too ridiculous girl, can you suppose that you are not useful to me?' exclaimed Aunt Betsy, impatiently. 'Is there a single hour of your day unoccupied? Granted that my original motive was a desire to give a comfortable home to a dear girl who seemed in need of new sur-

roundings, but that idea would hardly have occurred to me unless I had begun to feel the want of some energetic helpmate to lighten the load of my daily duties. The experiment has answered admirably, as far as I am concerned. But it is just possible you feel otherwise. You may think that you could make better use of your powers—earn double my poor salary, win distinction by your fine playing, dress better, see more of the world. I daresay to a girl of your age Kingthorpe seems a kind of living death.'

'So far from that, I love Kingthorpe with all my heart, so much that I almost hate myself for not having been born here, for not being able to say these are my native fields, I was cradled among these hills.'

'So be it. If you love Kingthorpe and love me, you have nothing to do but to stay here till the hero of your life-story comes to carry you off.'

'There will be no such hero.'

'Oh, yes, there will! Every story, however humble, has its hero; but yours is going to be a very magnificent personage, I hope.'

The little clock on the chimney-piece chimed the half-hour after midnight, whereupon Aunt Betsy started up and called for her candle. She and Ida kissed as they wished each other good night on the threshold of the elder lady's room.

After this conversation, how could Ida ever again broach the subject of departure? and yet she felt that sooner or later she must depart. Honour, conscience, womanly feeling, forbade that she should remain at the cost of Brian Walford's banishment.

CHAPTER III.

KINGTHORPE SOCIETY.

On New Year's Eve Miss Wendover gave one of her famous dinner-parties; famous because it was always said that her dinners were, on their scale, better than anybody else's,—yea, even than Dr. Rylance's, although that gentleman spared no expense, and had been known to induce the French cook from the Dolphin at Southampton to come over and prepare the feast for him.

Miss Wendover's dinner was an excuse for the bringing forth of rich stores of old china, old glass, and older silver—the accumulations of aunts and uncles for past generations, and in some part of the lady herself, who had the true spirit of a collector, that special gift which the French connoisseur calls *le flair*. Ida and the lady of the house worked diligently all the morning in un-

papering and polishing these treasures; and the dinner table, with its antique silver, Derby china, heavy diamond-cut glass, and white and scarlet exotics, was a picture to gladden the eyes of Aunt Betsy's guests.

The party consisted of Colonel and Mrs. Wendover, with their daughter Bessie, admitted to this sacred function for the first time in her young life, and duly impressed with the solemnity of the occasion; the Vicar and his wife; the new curate, an Oxford M.A., and a sprig of a good old family tree, altogether something very superior in the way of curates; Mr. and Mrs. Hildrop Havenant, the great people of a neighbouring settlement, with their eldest son, also an Oxonian; and Dr. and Miss Rylance.

'Be sure you two girls look your best to-night,' said Miss Wendover, as she sat before the fire with Bessie and Ida, enjoying the free and easy luxury of a substantial afternoon tea, which would enable them all to be gracefully indifferent to the more solid features of dinner, and duly on the alert to make conversation. 'We shall have three eligible men,'

'How do you make three, Aunt Betsy?' inquired her niece. 'Of course we all know that young Hildrop Havenant is heir to nearly all the land between Havenant and Romsey; but he is such a mass of affectation that I can't imagine anybody wanting to marry him. And as for Mr. Jardine——'

'Is he a mass of affectation too, Bess?' inquired Aunt Betsy with intention, for Mr. Jardine, the curate, was supposed to have impressed the damsel's fancy more deeply than she would care to own. 'He is an Oxford man.'

'There is Oxford and Oxford,' said Bess. 'If all the Oxford men were like young Havenant, the only course open to the rest of the world would be to burn Oxford, just as Oxford burned the martyrs.'

'Well, we may count Mr. Jardine as an eligible, I suppose?'

'But that only makes two. Who is your third?' asked Bessie.

'Dr. Rylance.'

'Dr. Rylance an eligible!' cried Bessie, with

girlhood's frank laughter at the absurd idea of middle age coming into the market to bid for youth. 'Why, auntie, the man must be fifty.'

'Five-and-forty at most, and very young-looking for his age; very polished, very well off. There are many girls who would be proud to win such a husband,' said Miss Wendover, glancing at Ida in the firelight.

She wanted to test the girl's temper—to find out, were it possible, whether this girl, whom she so inclined to love, tried in the fierce furnace of poverty, had acquired mercenary instincts. She had heard from Urania of that reckless speech about marrying for money, and she wanted to know how much or how little that speech had implied.

Ida was silent. She had never told anyone of Dr. Rylance's offer. She would have deemed it dishonourable to let anyone into the secret of his humiliation—to let his little world know that he, so superior a person, could offer himself and be rejected.

'What do you think now, Bess,' pursued

Miss Wendover, 'would it not be rather a nice thing if Dr. Rylance were to marry Ida? We all know how much he admires her.'

'It would be a very horrid thing,' cried the impetuous Bess. 'I would ever so much rather Ida married poor Brian, although they had to pig in furnished lodgings for the first ten years of their life. Crabbed age and youth cannot dwell together.'

'But Dr. Rylance is not crabbed, and he is not old.'

'Let him marry a lady of the same doubtful age, which seems old to me, but young to you, and then no one will find fault with him,' said Bess, savagely. 'I feel an inward and spiritual conviction that Ida is doomed to marry Brian Walford. The poor fellow was so hopelessly in love with her when he left this place, that if she had not a stone inside her instead of a heart, she would have accepted him; but *magno est amor et prævalebit!*' concluded Bess, with a mighty effort, 'I'm sure I hope that's right.'

'I think it must be time for you to go home and dress, if you really wish to look nice to-night,' said Ida, severely. 'You know you generally find yourself without frilling, or something wrong, at the last moment.'

'Heavens!' exclaimed Bessie, starting up and upsetting the petted Persian, which had been reposing in her lap, and which now skulked off resentfully, with a swollen tail, to hide its indignation under a chair, 'you are as bad as an oracle. I have yards and yards of frilling to sew on before I dress—my sleeves—my neck—my sweeper.'

'Shall I run over and sew the frills on for you?' asked Ida.

'You!' when you are going to wear that lovely pink gown. You will want hours to dress. No: Blanche must make herself useful for once in her ridiculous life. *Au revoir*, auntie darling. Go, lovely rose'—to Ida—'and make yourself still lovelier in order to captivate Dr. Rylance.'

The dinner was over. It had passed without

a hitch, and the gentlemen were now enjoying their claret and conversation in a comfortable semicircle in front of Miss Wendover's roomy hearth.

The conversation was for the most part strictly local, Colonel Wendover and Mr. Hildrop Havenant leading, and the Vicar a good second; but now and then there was a brief diversion from the parish to European politics, when Dr. Rylance—who secretly abhorred parochial talk—dashed to the fore and talked with an authority which it was hard for the others to keep under. He spoke of the impending declaration of war—there is generally some such thing—as if he had been at the War Office that morning in confidential converse with the chief officials; but this was more than Squire Havenant could endure, and he flatly contradicted the physician on the strength of his morning's correspondence. Mr. Havenant always talked of his letters as if they contained all the law and the prophets. His correspondents were high in office, unimpeachable authorities, men who had the ear of the House, or who pulled the strings of the Government.

I am told on the best authority that there will be no war,' he said, swelling, or seeming to swell, as he spoke.

He was a large man, with a florid complexion and gray mutton-chop whiskers.

Dr. Rylance shrugged his shoulders and smiled blandly. It was the calm incredulous smile with which he encountered any rival medico who was bold enough to question his treatment.

'That is not the opinion of the War Office,' he said quietly.

'But it is the opinion of men who dictate to the War Office,' replied Mr. Havenant.

'We couldn't have a better place for the working men's club than old Parker's cottage,' said the Vicar, addressing himself to Colonel Wendover.

'If Russia advances a foot farther there must be war in Beloochistan,' said Dr. Rylance; 'and if England is blind to the exigencies of the situation, I should like to know how you are going to get your troops through the Bolan Pass.'

'A single line to Romsey would send up the value of land fifty per cent.,' said the Colonel, who cared much more about Hampshire than Hindostan, although the best years of his life had been spent under Indian skies.

Hildrop Havenant pricked up his ears, and forgot all about the War Office.

'If the railway company had any pluck they ought to get that Bill through next Session,' he said, meaning a Bill for a loop between Winchester and Romsey.

While the elder gentlemen prosed over their wine the two younger men had found their way, first to the garden, for a cigar under the frosty moon, then back to Miss Wendover's pretty drawing-room, where Ida was playing Schumann's 'Träumerei' at one end of the room with Bessie for her only audience, while Miss Rylance, Miss Wendover, and the three matrons made a stately group around and about the fire-place.

Urania was providing the greater part of the conversation. She had spent a delightful fortnight in Cavendish Square at the end of November,

and had been everywhere and seen everything—winter exhibitions—new plays.

'I had no idea there could be so many nice people in town out of the season,' she said with a grand air. 'But then my father knows all the nicest people: he cultivates no Philistines.'

The Vicar's wife required to have this last remark explained to her. She only knew the Philistines of Scripture, an unfortunate people who seem always to have been in the wrong.

'And you saw some good pictures?' inquired Aunt Betsy.

'A few good ones and acres of daubs,' replied Urania. 'Why will so many people paint? There are pictures which are an affliction to the eye—an outrage upon common sense. Instead of a huge gallery lined from floor to ceiling with commonplace, why cannot we have a Temple with a single Watts, or Burne Jones, or Dante Rossetti, which one could go in and worship quietly in a subdued light?'

'That is a horridly expensive way of seeing pictures,' said the Vicar's wife; 'I hate paying

a shilling for seeing a single picture. If it is ever so good one feels one has had so little for one's money. Now at the Academy there are always at least fifty pictures which delight me.'

'You must be very easy to please,' said Urania.

'I am,' replied the Vicar's wife, curtly, 'and that is one of the blessings for which I am thankful to God. I hate your *nil admiraris*,' added the lady, as if it were the name of a species.

After this Urania became suddenly interested in Schumann, and glided across the room to see what the music meant.

'That is very sweet,' she murmured, sinking into a seat by Bessie; 'classical, of course?'

'Schumann,' answered Ida, briefly.

'I thought so. It has that delicious vagueness one only finds in German music—a half-developed meaning—leaving wide horizons of melodious uncertainty.'

This was a conversational style which Miss Rylance had cultivated since her entrance into the small world of Kingthorpe, and the larger

world of Cavendish Square, as a grown-up young woman. She had seen a good deal of a semi-artistic, quasi-literary circle, in which her father was the medical oracle, attending actresses and singers without any more substantial guerdon than free admittance to the best theatres on the best nights; prescribing for newspaper-men and literary lions, who sang his praises wherever they went.

Urania had fallen at once into all the tricks and manners of the new school. She had taken to short waists and broad sashes, and a style of drapery which accentuated the elegant slimness of her figure. She affected out-of-the-way colours, and quaint combinations—pale pinks and olive greens, tawny yellow and faded russet—and bought her gowns at a Japanese warehouse, where limp lengths of flimsy cashmere were mixed in artistic confusion with sixpenny teapots and paper umbrellas. In a word, Miss Rylance had become a disciple of the peacock-feather school of art, and affected to despise every other development of intellect or beauty.

This was the first time that she and Ida had

met since the latter's return to Kingthorpe, except indeed for briefest greetings in the churchyard after morning service. Ida had not yet upbraided her for the trick of which she was the author and originator, but Urania was in no wise grateful for this forbearance. She had acted with deliberate maliciousness; and she wanted to know that her malice had given pain. The whole thing was a failure if it had not hurt the girl who had been audacious enough to outshine Miss Rylance, and to fascinate Miss Rylance's father. Urania had no idea that the physician had offered himself and his two houses to Ida Palliser, nay, had even pledged himself to sacrifice his daughter at the shrine of his new love. She knew that he admired Miss Palliser more than he had ever admired anyone else within her knowledge, and this was more than enough to make Ida hateful.

Ida was particularly obnoxious this evening, in that pale pink cashmere gown, with a falling collar of fine old Brussels point, a Christmas gift from Mrs. Wendover. The gown might not be the highest development of the Grosvenor Gallery

school, but it was at once picturesque and becoming, and Ida was looking her loveliest.

'Why have you never come to see me since your return?' inquired Urania, with languid graciousness.

'I did not think you wanted me,' Ida answered, coolly.

'I am always glad to see my friends. I stop at home on Thursday afternoons on purpose; but perhaps you have not quite forgiven Bess and me for that little bit of fun we indulged in last September,' said Urania.

'I have quite forgiven Bess her share of the joke,' answered Ida, scanning Miss Rylance's smiling countenance with dark, scornful eyes, 'because I know she had no idea of giving me pain.'

'But won't you forgive me too? Are you going to leave me out in the cold?'

'I don't think you care a straw whether I forgive or do not forgive you. You wanted to wound me—to humiliate me—and you succeeded—to a certain degree. But you see I have sur-

vived the humiliation. You did not hurt me quite so much as you intended, perhaps.'

'What a too absurd view to take of the thing,' cried Urania, with an injured air. 'An innocent practical joke, not involving harm of any kind; a little girlish prank played on the spur of the moment. I thought you were more sensible than to be offended—much less seriously angry—at any such nonsense.'

Ida contemplated her enemy silently for a few moments, as her hands wandered softly through one of those Kinder-scenen which she knew by heart.

'If I am mistaken in your motives it is I who have to apologise,' she said, quietly. 'Perhaps I am inclined to make too much of what is really nothing. But I detest all practical jokes, and I should have thought you were the very last person to indulge in one, Miss Rylance. Sportiveness is hardly in your line.'

'Nobody is always wise,' murmured Urania, with her disagreeable simper.

'Not even Miss Rylance?' questioned Ida, without looking up from the keys.

'Please don't quarrel,' pleaded Bessie, piteously; 'such a bad use for the last night of the year. It was more my fault than anyone else's, though the suggestion did certainly come from Urania —but no harm has come of it—nor good either, I am sorry to say—and I have repented in sackcloth and ashes. Why should the dismal failure be raked up to-night?'

'I should not have spoken of it if Miss Rylance had been silent,' said Ida; and here, happily, the two young men came in, and made at once for the group of girls by the piano, whereupon Urania had an opportunity of parading her newest ideas, all second, third, or even fourth-hand, before the young Oxonians. One young Oxonian was chillingly indifferent to the later developments of modern thought, and had eyes for no one but Bessie, whose childish face beamed with smiles as he talked to her, although his homely theme was old Sam Jones's rheumatics, and the Providence which had preserved Martha Morris's boy from instant death when he tumbled into the fire. It was only parish talk, but Bessie

felt as happy as if one of the saints of old had condescended to converse with her—proud and pleased, too, when Mr. Jardine told her how grateful old Jones was for her occasional visits, and how her goodness to Mrs. Morris had made a deep impression upon that personage, commonly reported to have 'a temper' and to be altogether a difficult subject.

The conversation drifted not unnaturally from parochial to more personal topics, and Mr. Jardine showed himself interested in Bessie's pursuits, studies, and amusements.

'I hear so much of you from those two brothers of yours,' said the curate—'fine, frank fellows. They often join me in my walks.'

'I'm sure it is very good of you to have anything to say to them,' replied Bessie, feeling, like other girls of eighteen, that there could hardly be anything more despicable — from a Society point of view — than her two brothers. 'They are laboriously idle all through the holidays.'

'Well, I daresay they might work a little more, with ultimate advantage,' said Mr. Jardine,

smiling; 'but it is pleasant to see boys enjoy life so thoroughly. They are fond of all open-air amusements, and they are keen observers, and I find that they think a good deal, which is a stage towards work.'

'They are not utterly idiotic,' sighed Bessie; 'but they never read, and they break things in a dreadful way. The legs of our chairs snap under those two boys as if old oak were touch-wood; and Blanche and Eva, who ought to know better, devote all their energies to imitating them.'

The other gentlemen had come in by this time, and Dr. Rylance came gliding across the room with his gentlemanly but somewhat cat-like tread, and planted himself behind Ida, bending down to question her about her music, and letting her see that he admired her as much as ever, and had even forgiven her for refusing him. But she rose as soon as she decently could, and left the piano.

'Miss Rylance will sing, I hope,' she said, politely.

Miss Wendover came over to make the same

request, and Urania sang the last fashionable ballad, 'Blind Man's Holiday,' in a hard chilly voice which was as unpleasant as a voice well could be without being actually out of tune.

After this Bessie sang 'Darby and Joan,' in a sweet contralto, but with a doleful slowness which hung heavily upon the spirits of the company, and a duly dismal effect having been produced, the young ladies were cordially thanked for—leaving off.

A pair of whist-tables were now started for the elders, while the three girls and the two Oxonians still clustered round the piano, and seemed to find plenty to talk about, till sweetly and suddenly upon the still night air came the silver tones of the church bells.

Miss Wendover started up from the card-table with a solemn look, as the curate opened a window and let in a flood of sound. A silent hush fell upon everyone.

'The New Year is born,' said Aunt Betsy; 'may it spare us those we love, and end as peacefully for us as the year that is just dead!'

And then they all shook hands with each other and parted.

The dance at The Knoll was a success, and Ida danced with the best men in the room, and was as much courted and admired as if she had been the greatest heiress in that part of Hampshire. Urania Rylance went simpering about the room telling everybody, in the kindest way, who Miss Palliser was, and how she had been an ill-used drudge at a suburban finishing school, before that dear good Miss Wendover took her as a useful companion; but even that crushing phrase, 'useful companion,' did not degrade Ida in the eyes of her admirers.

'Palliser's a good name,' said one youth. 'There's a Sir Vernon Palliser — knew him and his brother at Cambridge—members of the Alpine Club—great athletes. Any relation?'

'Very distant, I should think, from what I know of Miss Palliser's circumstances; answered Miss Rylance, with an incredulous sneer.'

But Urania failed in making youth and beauty

contemptible, and was fain to admit to herself that Ida Palliser was the belle of the room. Dr. Rylance, who had not been invited, but who looked so well and so young that no one could be angry with him for coming, hung upon Miss Palliser's steps, and tortured her with his politeness.

For Ida the festivity was not all happiness. She would have been happier at the Homestead, sitting by the fire reading aloud to Miss Wendover—happier almost anywhere—for she had not only to endure a kind of gentlemanly persecution from Dr. Rylance, but she was tormented by an ever present dread of Brian Walford's appearance. Bessie had sent him a telegram only that morning, imploring him, as a personal favour, to be present at her ball, vowing that she would be deeply offended with him if he did not come; and more than once in the course of the evening Bessie had told Ida that there was still time, there was a train now just due at Winchester, and that might have brought him. Ida breathed more freely after midnight, when it was obviously too late for any one else to arrive.

'It is your fault,' said Bessie, pettishly. 'If you had not treated him very unkindly at Mauleverer he would be here to-night. He never failed me before.'

Ida reddened, and then grew very pale.

'I see,' she said, you think I deprive you of your cousin's society. I will ask Miss Wendover to let me go back to France.'

'No, no, no, you inhuman creature! how can you talk like that? You know that I love you ever so much better than Brian, though he is my own kith and kin. I would not lose you for worlds. I don't care a straw about his coming, for my own sake. Only I should so like you to marry him, and be one of us. Oh, here's that odious Dr. Rylance stealing after you. Aunt Betsy is quite right—the man would like to marry you—but you won't accept him, will you, darling?—not even to have your own house in Cavendish Square, a victoria and brougham, and all those blessings we hear so much about from Urania. Remember, you would have her for a step-daughter into the bargain.'

'Be assured, dear Bess, I shall never be Urania's step-mother. And now, darling, put all thoughts of matrimony out of your head; for me, at least.'

That brief flash of Christmas and New Year's gaiety was soon over. The Knoll resumed its wonted domestic calm. Dr. Rylance went back to Cavendish Square, and only emerged occasionally from the London vortex to spend a peaceful day or two at Kingthorpe. His daughter was not installed as mistress of his town house, as she had fondly hoped would be the case. She was permitted to spend an occasional week, sometimes stretched to ten days or a fortnight, in Cavendish Square; but the cook-housekeeper and the clever German servant, half valet, half butler, still reigned supreme in that well-ordered establishment; and Urania felt that she had no more authority than a visitor. She dared not find fault with servants who had lived ten years in her father's service, and who suited him perfectly—even had there been any legitimate reason for fault-finding, which there was not.

Dr. Rylance having got on so comfortably during

the last twelve years of his life without a mistress for his town house, was disinclined to surrender his freedom to a daughter who had more than once ventured to question his actions, to hint that he was not all wise. He considered it a duty to introduce his daughter into the pleasant circles where he was petted and made much of; and he fondly hoped she would speedily find a husband sufficiently eligible to be allowed the privilege of taking her off her father's hands. But in the meanwhile, Urania in London was somewhat of a bore; and Dr. Rylance was never more cheerful than when driving her to Waterloo Station.

Miss Rylance's life, therefore, during this period alternated between rural seclusion and London gaiety. She came back to the pastoral phase of her existence with the feelings and demeanour of a martyr; and her only consolation was found in those calm airs of superiority which seemed justified by her intimate acquaintance with society, and her free use of a kind of jargon which she called modern thought.

'How you can manage to exist here all the

year round without going out of your mind, is more than I can understand,' she told Bessie.

'Well, I know Kingthorpe is dull,' replied Bess, meekly, 'but it's a dear old hole, and I never find the days too long, especially when those odious boys are at home.'

'But really now, Bessie, don't you think it is time you should leave off playing with boys, and begin wearing gloves?' sneered Urania.

'I did wear gloves at Bournemouth, religiously —mousquetaires, up to my elbows; never went out without them. No, Ranie, I am never dull at old Kingthorpe; and then there is always a hope of Bournemouth.'

'Bournemouth is worse than this,' exclaimed Urania. 'There is nothing so laboriously dismal as a semi-fashionable watering-place.'

Talk as she might, Miss Rylance could not sour Bessie's happy disposition with the vinegar of discontent. Hers was a sweet, joyous soul; and just now, had she dared to speak the truth, she would have said that this pastoral village of Kingthorpe, this cluster of fine old houses and

comfortable cottages, grouped around an ancient parish church, was to her the central point of the universe, to leave which would be as Eve's banishment from Eden. The pure and tender heart had found its shrine, and laid down its offering of reverent devotion. Mr. Jardine had said nothing as yet, but he had sedulously cultivated Bessie Wendover's society, and had made himself eminently agreeable to her parents, who could find no fault with a man who was at once a scholar and a gentleman, and who had an income which made him comfortably independent of immediate preferment.

He was enthusiastic, and he could afford to give his enthusiasm full scope. Kingthorpe suited him admirably. It was a parish rich in sweet associations. The present Vicar was a good, easy-going man, a High Churchman of the old school rather than the new, yet able to sympathize with men of more advanced opinions and fiercer energies.

Thus it was that while Miss Rylance found her bower at Kingthorpe a place of dullness and

discontent, Bessie rose every morning to a new day of joy and gladness, which began, oh, so sweetly, in the early morning service, in which John Jardine's deep musical voice gave new force and meaning to the daily lessons, new melody to the Psalms Ida was always present at this morning service; and the two girls used to walk home together through the dewy fields, sometimes one, sometimes the other going out of her way to accompany her friend. Bessie poured all her innocent secrets into Ida's ear, expatiating with sweet girlish folly upon every look and tone of Mr. Jardine's, asking Ida again and again if she thought that he cared, ever so little, for her.

'You never tell me any of your secrets, Ida,' she said, reproachfully, after one of these lengthy discussions. 'I am always prosing about my affairs, until I must seem a lump of egotism. Why don't you make me listen sometimes? I should be deeply interested in any dream of yours, if it were ever so wild.'

'My darling, I have no dreams, wild or tame,' said Ida.

She could not say that she had no secret, having that one dreadful secret hanging over her and overshadowing her life.

'And have you never been in love?'

'Never. I once thought—almost thought—that I was in love. It was like drifting away in a frail, dancing little boat over an unknown sea—all very well while the sun shone and the boat went gaily—suddenly the boat fell to pieces, and I found myself in the cold, cruel water.'

'Horrid!' cried Bess, with a shudder. 'That couldnot have been real love.'

'No, dear, it was a will-o'-the-wisp, not the true light.'

'And you have got over it?'

'Quite. I am perfectly happy in the life I lead now.'

This was the truth. There are these calm pauses in most lives—blessed intervals of bliss without passion—a period in which heart and mind are both at rest, and yet growing and becoming nobler and purer in the time of repose, just as the body grows during sleep.

And thus Ida's life, full and useful, glided on, and the days went by only too swiftly; for it was never out of her mind that these days of tranquil happiness were numbered, that she was bound in honour to leave Kingthorpe before Brian Walford could feel the oppression of banishment from his kindred. At present Brian Walford was living in Paris, with an old college friend, both these youths being supposed to be studying the French language and literature, with a view to making themselves more valuable at the English bar. He had given up his chambers in Verulam Buildings, as too expensive for a man living from hand to mouth. He was understood to be contributing to the English magazines, and to be getting his living decently, but with no immediate prospect of briefs.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRUE KNIGHT.

KINGTHORPE, beautiful even in the winter, with its noble panorama of hills and woods, was now looking its loveliest in the leafy month of June. Ida had been living with Miss Wendover nearly eight months, and had become to her as a daughter, waiting upon her with faithful and loving service, always a bright and cheerful companion, joining with heart and hand in all good works. Her active life, her freedom from daily cares, had brightened her proud young beauty. She was lovelier than she had ever been as the belle of Mauleverer Manor, for that defiant look which had been the outcome of oppression had now given place to softness and smiles. The light of happiness beamed in her dark eyes. Between December and June this tranquil existence had scarcely been

rippled by anything that could be called an event, save the one grand event of Bessie Wendover's life —her engagement to John Jardine, who had proposed quite unexpectedly, as Bessie declared, one evening in May, when the two had gone into a certain copse at the back of The Knoll gardens, famous as the immemorial resort of nightingales. Here, instead of listening to the nightingales, or silently awaiting a gush of melody from those pensive birds, Mr. Jardine had poured out his own melodious strain, which took the form of an ardent declaration. Bessie, who had been doing 'He loves me, loves me not,' with every flower in the garden—forgetting that from a botanical point of view the result was considerably influenced by the nature of the flower—pretended to be intensely surprised; made believe there was nothing further from her thoughts; and then, when her emboldened lover folded her to his breast, owned shyly, and with tears, that she had loved him desperately ever since Christmas, and that she would have been heartbroken had he married anyone else.

Colonel and Mrs. Wendover received the Curate's declaration with the coolness which is so aggravating in parents, who would hardly be elated if the sons of God came down once more to propose for the daughters of men.

They both considered that Bessie was ridiculously young—much too young to receive an offer of marriage. They consented, ultimately, to an engagement; but Bessie was not to be married till after her twenty-first birthday. This meant two years from next September, and Mr. Jardine pleaded hard for a milder sentence. Surely one year would be long enough to wait, when Bessie and he were so sure of their own minds.

'Bessie is too young to be sure of anything,' said the Colonel; 'and two years will only give you time to find a living and a nice cosy vicarage, or rectory, as the case may be.'

Mr. Jardine did not venture to remind Colonel Wendover that for him the cosiness of vicarage or rectory was a mere detail as compared with a worthy field for his labours. He meant to spend his life where it would be of most use to his

fellow-creatures; even although the call of duty should come to him from the smokiest of manufacturing towns, or in the flat, dull fields of Lincolnshire, among pitmen and stockingers. He was not the kind of man to consider the snug rectory houses or fat glebes, but rather the kind of man to take upon himself some long-neglected parish, and ruin himself in building church and schools.

Fortunately for Bessie's hopes, however, Colonel Wendover did not know this.

The Curate complained to Aunt Betsy of her brother's hardness.

'Why cannot we be married at the end of this year?' he said. 'We have pledged ourselves to spend our lives together. Why should we not begin that bright new life—bright and new, at least to me—in a few months? That would be ample time for the Colonel and Mrs. Wendover to get accustomed to the idea of Bessie's marriage.'

'But a few months will not make her old enough or wise enough for a clergyman's wife,' said Miss Wendover.

'She has plenty of wisdom—the wisdom of a generous and tender heart—the best kind of wisdom. All her instincts, all her impulses, are pure, and true, and noble. What can age give her better than that? Girl as she is, my parish will be the better for her sweet influence. She will be the sunshine of my people's life as well as of mine. How will she grow wiser by living two years longer, and reading novels, and dancing at Bournemouth? I don't want her to be worldly-wise; and the better kind of wisdom comes from above. She will learn that in the quiet of her married home.'

'I see,' said Miss Wendover, smiling at him; 'you don't quite like the afternoon dances and tennis parties at Bournemouth.'

'Pray don't suppose I am jealous,' said the Curate. 'My trust in my darling's goodness and purity is the strongest part of my love. But I don't want to see the best years of her youth, her freshness, her girlish energy and enthusiasm, frittered away upon dances, and tennis, and dress, which has lately been elevated into an art. I

want her help, I want her sympathy, I want her for my own—the better part of myself—going hand in hand with me in all my hopes and acts.'

'Two years sounds a long time,' said Miss Wendover, musingly, 'and I suppose, at your age and Bessie's, it *is* a long time; though at mine the years flow onward with such a gliding motion that it is only one's looking-glass, and the quarterly accounts, that tell one time is moving. However, I have seen a good many of these two-year engagements——'

'Yes.'

'And I have seldom seen one of them last a twelvemonth.'

'They have ended unhappily?'

'Quite the contrary. They have ended in a premature wedding. The young people have put their heads together, and have talked over the flinty-hearted parents; and some bright morning when the father and mother have been in a good temper the order for the trousseau has been given, the bridesmaids have received notice, and in six weeks the whole business was over, and the old

people rather glad to have got rid of a love-sick damsel and her attendant swain. There is no greater nuisance in a house than engaged sweethearts. Who knows whether you and Bessie may not be equally fortunate!'

'I hope we may be so,' said the Curate; 'but I don't think we shall make ourselves obnoxious.'

'Oh, of course you think not. Every man believes himself superior to every form of silliness, but I never saw a lover yet who did not lapse sooner or later into mild idiocy.'

'*Amare et sapere vix deo conceditur.*'

'Of course. Indeed, with the gods of Olympus it was quite the other way. Nothing could be more absurd than their goings on.'

Ida was delighted at her friend's happiness, and was never tired of hearing about Mr. Jardine's virtues. Love had already begun to exercise a sobering influence upon Bessie. She no longer romped with the boys, and she wore gloves. She had become very studious of her appearance, but all those little coquettish arts of the toilet which

she had learned last autumn at Bournemouth, the cluster of flowers pinned on her shoulder, the laces and frivolities, were eschewed ; lest Mr. Jardine should be reminded of the wanton eyed daughters of Zion, with their tinckling ornaments, and chains, and bracelets, and mufflers, and rings, and nose-jewels. She began to read with a view to improving her mind, and plodded laboriously through certain books of the advanced Anglican school which her lover had told her were good. But she learnt a great deal more from Mr. Jardine's oral instructions than from any books, and when the Winchester boys came home for an occasional Sunday they found her brimful of ecclesiastical knowledge, and at once nick-named her the Perambulating Rubric, or by the name of any feminine saint which their limited learning suggested. Fortunately for Bessie, however, their jests were not unkindly meant, and they liked Mr. Jardine, whose knowledge of natural history, the ways and manners of every creature that flew, or walked, or crawled, or swam in that region of hill and valley, made him respectable in their eyes.

'He's not half a bad fellow—for a parson,' said Horatio, condescendingly.

'And wouldn't he make a jolly schoolmaster?' exclaimed Reginald. 'Boys would get on capitally with Jardine. They'd never try to bosh *him*.'

'Schoolmaster, indeed?' echoed Bessie, with an offended air.

'I suppose you think it wouldn't be good enough for him? You expect him to be made an archbishop off-hand, without being educated up to his work by the rising generation. No doubt you forget that there have been such men as Arnold, and Temple, and Moberly. Pray what higher office can a man hold in this world than to form the minds of the rising generation?'

'I wish your master would form your manners,' said Bessie, 'for they are simply detestable.'

It was nearly the end of June, and the song of the nightingales was growing rarer in the twilight woods.

Ida started early one heavenly midsummer morning with her book and her luncheon in a

little basket, to see the old lodgekeeper at Wendover Abbey, who had nursed the elder Wendovers when they were babies in the nurseries at the Abbey, and who had lived in a gothic cottage at the gate—built on purpose for her by the last squire—ever since her retirement from active service. This walk to the Abbey was one of Ida's favourite rambles, and on this June morning the common, the wood, the corn-fields, and distant hills were glorious with that fleeting beauty of summer which gives a glamour to the most commonplace scenery.

She had a long idle morning before her, a thing which happened rarely. Miss Wendover had driven to Romsey with the Colonel and his wife, to lunch with some old friends in the neighbourhood of that quiet town, and was not likely to be home till afternoon tea. Bessie was left in charge of the younger members of the household, and was further deeply engaged in an elaborate piece of ecclesiastical embroidery, all crimson and gold, and peacock floss, which she hoped to finish before All Saints' Day.

Old Mrs. Rowse, the gatekeeper, was delighted to see Miss Palliser. The young lady was a frequent visitor, for the old woman was entitled to particular attention as a sufferer from chronic rheumatism, unable to do more than just crawl into her little patch of garden, or to the grass-plat before her door on a sunny afternoon. Her days were spent, for the most part, in an arm-chair in front of the neat little grate, where a handful of fire burnt, winter and summer, diffusing a turfy odour.

Ida liked to hear the old woman talk of the past. She had been a bright young girl, under-nurse, when the old squire was born; and now the squire had been lying at rest in the family vault for nigh upon fifteen years, and here she was still, without kith or kin, or a friend in the world except the Wendovers.

She liked to hold forth upon the remarkable events of her life—from her birth in a labourer's cottage, about half a mile from the Abbey, to the last time she had been able to walk as far as the parish church, now five years ago. She was

cheerful, yet made the most of her afflictions, and seemed to think that chronic rheumatism of her particular type was a social distinction. She was also proud of her advanced age, and had hopes of living into the nineties, and having her death recorded in the county papers.

That romantic feeling about the Abbey which had taken possession of Ida's mind on her first visit, had hardly been lessened by familiarity with the place, or even by those painful associations which made the spot fatal to her. The time-old deserted mansion was still to her fancy a poem in stone; and although she could not think about its unknown master without a shudder, recalling her miserable delusion, she could not banish his image from her thoughts, when she roamed about the park, or explored the house, where the few old servants had grown fond of her and suffered her to wander at will.

When she had spent an hour with Mrs. Rowse, she walked on to the Abbey, and seated herself to eat her sandwiches and read her beloved Shelley under the cedar beneath which she

and the Wendover party had picnicked so gaily on the day of her first visit. Shelley harmonised with her thoughtful moods, for with most of his longer poems there is interwoven that sense of wrong and sorrow, that idea of a life spoiled and blighted by the oppression of stern social laws, which could but remind Ida of her own entanglement. She had bound herself by a chain that could never be broken, and here she read of how all noblest and grandest impulses are above the law, and refuse to be so bound; and how, in such cases, it is noble to defy and trample upon the law. A kind of heroic lawlessness, spiritualised and diffused in a cloud of exquisite poetry, was what she found in her Shelley; and it comforted her to know that before her time there had been lofty souls caught in the web of their own folly.

When she was tired of reading she went into the Abbey. The great hall door stood open to admit the summer air and sunshine. Ida wandered from one room to another as freely as if she had been in her own house, knowing that any servant she met would be pleased to see her there. The

old housekeeper was a devoted admirer of Miss Palliser; the two young housemaids were her pupils in a class which met every Sunday afternoon for study of the Scriptures. She had no fear of being considered an intruder. Many of the casements stood open, and there was the scent of flowers in the silent old rooms, where all was neat and prim, albeit a little faded and gray.

Ida loved to explore the library, where the books were for the most part quaint and old, original editions of seventeenth and eighteenth century books, in sober substantial bindings. It was pleasant to take out a volume of one of the old poets, or the eighteenth century essayists, and to read a few stanzas, or a paper of Addison's or Steele's, standing by the open window in the air and sunlight.

The rooms in which she roamed at will were the public apartments of the Abbey, and although beautiful in her eyes, they had the stiffness and solemnity of rooms which are not for the common uses of daily life.

But on one occasion Mrs. Mawley, the house-

keeper, in a particularly communicative mood, showed her the suite of rooms in which Mr Wendover lived when he was alone; and here, in the study where he read, and wrote, and smoked, and brooded in the long quiet days, she saw those personal belongings which gave at least some clue to the character of the man. Here on shelves which lined the room from floor to ceiling, she saw the books which Brian Wendover had collected for his own especial pleasure, and the neatness of their arrangement and classification told her that the master of Wendover Abbey was a man of calm temper and orderly habits.

'You'll never see a book out of place when he leaves the room,' said Mrs. Mawley. 'I've seen him take down fifty volumes of a morning, when he's at his studies. 'I've seen the table covered with books, and books piled up on the carpet at each side of his chair, but they'd all be back on their shelves as neat as a new pin, when I went to tidy up the room after him. I never allow no butter-fingered girls in this room,

except to sweep or scrub under my own eye. There's not many ornaments, but what there is is precious, and the apple of master's eye.'

It was a lovely room, with a panelled oak ceiling, and a fine old oak mantel-piece, on which were three or four pieces of Oriental crackle. The large oak writing-table was neatly arranged with crimson leather blotting-book, despatch-box, old silver inkstand, and a pair of exquisite bronze statuettes of Apollo and Mercury, which seemed the presiding geniuses of the place.

'I don't believe Mr. Wendover could get on with his studies if those two figures weren't there,' said Mrs. Mawley.

The rooms were kept always aired and ready —no one knew at what hour the master might return. He was a good master, honoured and beloved by the old servants, who had known him from his infancy; and his lightest whim was respected. The fact that he should have given the best part of his life since he left Oxford to roving about foreign countries was lamented; but this roving temper was regarded as

only an eccentric manner of sowing those wild oats which youth must in some wise scatter; and it was hoped that with ripening years he would settle down and spend his days in the home of his ancestors. He might come home at any time, he had informed Mrs. Mawley in his last letter, received six weeks ago.

That glimpse of the room in which he lived gave Ida a vivid idea of the man—the calm, orderly student who had won high honours at the University, and was never happier than when absorbed in books that took him back to the past—to that very past which was presided over by the two pagan gods on the writing table. She noted that the wide block of books nearest Mr. Wendover's chair were all Greek and Latin; and straying round the room, she found Homers and Horaces, Greek playwrights and historians, repeating themselves many times, in various quaint costly editions. A scholar evidently—perhaps pragmatical and priggish. Bessie's coolness about her cousin implied that he was not altogether agreeable.

'Perhaps I should have liked him no better than the false Brian,' she said to herself to-day, as she stood musing before the old brown books in the library, thinking of that more individual collection which she had been allowed to inspect on her last visit.

She shuddered at the image of that other Brian, remembering but too vividly how she had last seen him, kneeling to her, claiming her as his own. God! could he so claim her? Was she verily his, to summon at his will?—his by the law of heaven and earth, and only enjoying her liberty by his sufferance?

The thought was horrible. She snatched a book from the shelf — anything to distract her mind. Happily, the book was Shakespeare, and she was soon lost in Lear's woes, wilder, deeper than any sorrow she had ever tasted.

She read for an hour, the soft air fanning her, the sun shining upon her, the scent of roses and lilies breathing gently round her as she sat in the deep oak window seat. Then the clock struck three, and it was time to think of leaving this

enchanted castle, where no prince or princess of fairy tale ever came.

There was no need for haste. She might depart at her leisure, and dawdle as much as she pleased on her homeward way. All she wanted was to be seated neat and trim in a carefully-arranged room, ready to pour out Aunt Betsy's afternoon tea, when the cobs returned from Romsey. She put Lear back in his place, and strolled slowly through the rooms, opening one into another, to the hall, where she stopped idly to look at her favourite picture, that portrait of Sir Tristram Wendover which was attributed to Vandyke—a noble portrait, and with much of Vandyke's manner, whoever the painter. It occupied the place of honour in a richly-carved panel above the wide chimney-piece, a trophy of arms arranged on each side.

Ida stood gazing dreamily at that picture—the dark, earnest eyes, under strongly marked brows, the commanding features, somewhat ruggedly modelled, but fine in their general effect—a Rembrandt face—every line telling; a face in

which manhood and intellect predominated over physical beauty; and yet to Ida's fancy the face was the finest she had ever seen. It was her ideal of the knightly countenance, the face of the man who has won many a hard fight over all comers, and has beaten that last and worst enemy, his own lower nature, leaving the lofty soul paramount over the world, the flesh, and the devil. So must Lancelot have looked, Ida thought, towards the close of life, when conscience had conquered passion. It was a face that showed the traces of sorrows lived down and temptations overcome—a face which must have been a living reproof to the butterfly sybarites of Charles the Second's Court. Ida knew no more of Sir Tristam's history than that he had been a brave soldier and a faithful servant of the Stuarts in evil and good fortune; that he had married somewhat late in life, to become the father of an only son, from whom the present race of Wendovers were descended. Ida had tried in vain to discover any resemblance to this pictured face in the Colonel or his sister; but it was

only to be supposed that the characteristics of the loyal knight had dwindled and vanished from the Wendover countenance with the passage of two centuries.

'No, there is not one of them has that noble look,' murmured Ida, thinking aloud, as she turned to leave the hall.

She found herself face to face with a man, who stood looking at her with friendly eyes, which in their earnest expression and grave dark brows curiously resembled the eyes of the picture. Her heart gave one leap, and then seemed to stand still. There could be only one man in the world with such a face as that, and in that house. Yes, it was a modified copy of the portrait—younger, the features less rugged, the skin paler and less tawny, the expression less intense. Yet even here, despite the friendly smile, there was a gravity, a look of determination which verged upon severity.

This time she was not deceived. This was that very Brian Wendover whom she had thought of in her foolish day-dreams, the first romantic fancy of her girlhood, last year: and now, in the flush

and glory of summer, he stood before her, smiling at her with eyes which seemed to invite her friendship.

'I am glad you like my ancestor's portrait,' he said. 'I could not resist watching you for the last five minutes, as you stood in rapt contemplation of the hero of our race; so unlike the manner of most visitors to the Abbey, who give Sir Tristram a casual glance, and go on to the next feature in the housekeeper's catalogue.'

She stood with burning cheeks, looking downward, like a guilty thing, and for a moment or two could hardly speak. Then she said, faltering—

'It is a very interesting portrait,' after which brilliant remark she stood looking helplessly towards the open door, which she could not reach without passing the stranger.

'I think I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Palliser,' he said. 'Old Mrs. Rowse told me you were here. I am Brian Wendover.'

Ida made him a little curtsey, so fluttering, so uncertain, as to have elicited the most severe reproof from Madame Rigolette could she have seen her pupil at this moment.

'I hope you do not mind,' she said, hesitatingly. 'Bessie and I have roamed about the Abbey often, while you were away, and to-day I came alone, and have been reading in the library for an hour or so.'

'I am delighted that the old house should not be quite abandoned.'

How different his tone in speaking of the Abbey from the false Brian's! There was tenderness and pride of race in every word.

'And I hope that my return will not scare either you or Bessie away; that you will come here as often as you feel inclined. I am something of a recluse when I am at home.'

'You are very kind,' said Ida, moving a little way towards the door. 'Have you been to The Knoll yet?'

'I have only just come from Winchester. I landed at Hull yesterday afternoon, and I have been travelling ever since. But I am very anxious to see my aunts and cousins, especially Aunt Betsy. If you will allow me I will walk back to Kingthorpe with you.'

Ida looked miserable at the suggestion.

'I—I—don't think Miss Wendover will be at home just yet,' she said. 'She has gone to the Grange, near Romsey, you know, to luncheon.'

'But a luncheon doesn't last for ever. What time do you expect her back?'

'Not till five, at the earliest.'

'And it is nearly half-past three. If you'll allow me to come with you I can lounge in that dear old orchard till Aunt Betsy comes home to give me some tea.'

What could Ida say to this very simple proposition? To object would have been prudish in the last degree. Brian Wendover could not know what manifold and guilty reasons she had for shrinking from any association with him. He could not know that for her there was something akin to terror in his name, that a sense of shame mingled with her every thought of him. For him she must needs be as other women, and it was her business to make him believe that he was to her as other men.

'I shall be very happy,' she said, and then,

with a final effort, she added, 'but are you not tired after your journey? Would it not be wiser to rest, and go to the Homestead a little later, at half-past seven, when you are sure of finding Miss Wendover at home.'

'I had rather risk it, and go now. I am only tired of railway travelling, smoke and sulphur, dust and heat. A quiet walk across the common and through the wood will be absolute refreshment and repose.'

After this there was nothing to be said, and they went out into the carriage-way in front of the Abbey, side by side, and across the broad expanse of turf, on which the cedars flung their wide stretching shadows, and so by the Park to the corn-fields, where the corn waved green and tall, and to the open common, above which the skylarks were soaring and singing as if the whole world were wild with joy.

They had not much to talk about, being such utter strangers to each other, and Brian Wendover naturally reserved and inclined to silence; but the little he did say was made agreeable by a

voice of singular richness and melody—just such a voice as that deep and thrilling organ which Canon Mozley has described in the famous Provost of Oriel, and which was a marked characteristic of at least one of Bishop Coplestone's nephews—a voice which gives weight and significance to mere commonplace.

Ida, not prone to shyness, was to-day as one stricken dumb. She could not think of this man walking by her side, so unconscious of evil, without unutterable humiliation. If he had been an altogether commonplace man—pompous, underbred, ridiculous in any way—the situation would have been a shade less tragic. But he came too near her ideal. This was the kind of man she had dreamed of, and she had accepted in his stead the first frivolous, foppish youth whom chance had presented to her, under a borrowed name. Her own instinct, her own imagination, had told her the kind of man Brian of the Abbey must needs be, and, in her sordid craving for wealth and social status, she had allowed herself to be fobbed off with so poor a counterfeit. And now

her very ideal — the dark-browed knight, with quiet dignity of manner, and that deep, earnest voice—had come upon the scene; and she thought of her folly with a keener shame than had touched her yet.

Brian walked at her side, saying very little, but not unobservant. He knew a good deal about this Miss Palliser from Bessie's letters, which had given him a detailed account of her chosen friend. He knew that the damsel had carried on a clandestine flirtation with his cousin, and had been expelled from Mauleverer Manor in consequence; and these facts, albeit Bessie had pictured her friend as the innocent victim of tyranny and wrong, had not given him a favourable opinion of his cousin's chosen companion. A girl who would meet a lover on the sly, a girl who was ignominiously ejected from a boarding-school, although clever and useful there, could not be a proper person for his cousin to know. He was sorry that Aunt Betsy's good nature had been stronger than her judgment, and that she had brought such a girl to Kingthorpe as a permanent

resident. He had imagined her a flashy damsel, underbred, with a vulgar style of beauty, a superficial cleverness, and all those baser arts by which the needy sometimes ingratiate themselves into the favour of the rich. Nothing could be more different from his fancy picture than the girl by whose side he was walking, under that cloudless sky, where the larks were singing high up in the blue.

What did he see, as he gravely contemplated the lady by his side? A perfect profile, in which refinement was as distinctly marked as beauty of line. Darkly fringed lids drooping over lovely eyes, which looked at him shyly, shrinkingly, with unaffected modesty, when compelled to look. A tall and beautifully modelled figure, set off by a simple white gown; glorious dark hair, crowned with the plainest of straw hats. There was nothing flashy or vulgar here, no trace of bad breeding in tone or manner. Was this a girl to carry on illicit flirtations, to be mean or underhand, to do anything meriting expulsion from a genteel boarding-school? A thousand times no! He

began to think that Bessie was right, that Aunt Betsy's judgment, face to face with the actual facts, had been wiser than his own view of the case at a distance. And then, suddenly remembering upon what grounds he was arriving at this more liberal view, he began to feel scornful of himself, after the manner of your thinking man, given to metaphysics.

'Heaven help me! I am as weak as the rest of my sex,' he said to himself. 'Because she is lovely I am ready to think she is good—ready to fall into the old, old trap which has snapped its wicked jaws upon so many victims. However, be she what she may, at the worst she is not vulgar. I am glad of that, for Bessie's sake.'

He tried to make a little conversation during the rest of the way, asking about different members of the Wendover family, and telling Ida some stray facts about his late wanderings. But she did not encourage him to talk. Her answers were faltering, her manner absent-minded. He began to think her stupid; and yet he had been told that she was a wonder of cleverness.

'I daresay her talent all lies in her finger's ends,' he thought. 'She plays Beethoven and works in crewels. That is a girl's idea of feminine genius. Perhaps she makes her own gowns, which is a higher flight, since it involves usefulness.'

It was only four o'clock when they went in at the little orchard gate, and Miss Wendover could hardly be expected for an hour. What was Ida to do with her guest, unless he kept his word and stayed in the orchard?

'Shall I send you out the newspapers, or any refreshment?' she asked.

There were rustic tables and chairs, a huge Japanese umbrella, every accommodation for lounging, in that prettiest bit of the spacious old orchard which adjoined the garden, and here Ida made this polite offer of refreshment for mind or body.

'No, thank you; I'll stay here and smoke a cigarette. I can get on very well without newspapers, having lived so long beyond easy reach of them.'

She left him, but glancing back at the garden

gate she saw him take a book from his pocket and settle himself in one of the basket chairs, with a luxurious air, like a man perfectly content. This was a kind of thing quite new to her in her experience of the Wendovers, who were not a bookish race.

She went into the house, and made all her little preparations for afternoon tea, filling the vases with freshly-cut flowers, drawing up blinds, arranging book-tables, work-baskets, curtains —all the details of the prettiest drawing-room in Kingthorpe, but walking to and fro all the while like a creature in a dream. She had not half recovered from her surprise, her painful wonder at Brian Wendover's appearance, at his strange likeness to her ideal knight —strange to her, but not miraculous, since such hereditary faces are to be found after the lapse of centuries.

When all her small duties had been performed she went up to her room, bathed her face and brushed her hair, and put on a fresher gown, and then sat down to read, trying to lose herself in the thoughts of another mind, trying to forget this

embarrassment, this sense of humiliation, which had come upon her. She sat thus for half an hour or so, reading 'The Caxtons,' one of her favourite novels, and felt a little more composed and philosophical when the rythmical beat of Brimstone and Treacle's eight iron shoes told her that Miss Wendover had returned.

She ran to the gate to welcome that kind friend, looking so fresh and bright in her clean white gown that Aunt Betsy saw no sign of the past struggle.

'Mr. Wendover is here,' she said, shyly, when Aunt Betsy had kissed her and given her some brief account of the day's adventures. The rest of the party had been deposited at The Knoll.

'Whom do you mean by Mr. Wendover, child?'

'Mr. Wendover of the Abbey. He is reading in the orchard.'

'Of course, I never saw him without a book in his hand. So he has come back at last. I am very glad. He is a good fellow, a little too reserved and self-contained, too fond of brooding

over some beautiful truism of Plato's when he ought to be thinking of deep drainage and a new school-house; but a good fellow for all that, and always ready with his cheque-book. Let us go and look for him.'

'You will find him in the orchard,' said Ida. 'I will go and hurry on the tea. You must want some tea after your dusty drive.'

'Dusty!' exclaimed Miss Wendover; 'we are positively smothered. Yes. I am dying for my tea; but I must see this nephew of mine first.'

Ida went back to the drawing-room, where everything was perfectly ready, as she knew very well beforehand; but she shrank with a sickly dread from any further acquaintance with the master of Wendover Abbey. She hoped that he and his aunt might say all they had to say to each other in the orchard, and that he would go on to The Knoll to pay his respects to the rest of his relations.

In this she was disappointed. Scarcely had she seated herself before the tea-table when Aunt Betsy and her nephew entered through the open window.

'You two young people have contrived to get acquainted without my aid,' said Miss Wendover, cheerily, 'so there's no necessity for any introduction. Now, Brian, sit down and make yourself comfortable. Give him some tea, Ida. I believe he is just civilised enough to like tea, in spite of his wanderings.'

'On account of them, you might as well say, Aunt Betsy. I drank nothing but tea in Scandinavia. It was the easiest thing to get.'

Ida's occupation at the table gave her an excuse for silence. She had only to attend to her cups and saucers, and to listen to Miss Wendover and her nephew, who had plenty to talk about. To hear that deep full voice, with its perfect intonation, was in itself a pleasure—pleasant, also, to discover that Brian Wendover, albeit a famous Balliol man and a Greek scholar after the Porsonian ideal, could still be warmly interested in simple things and lowly folk. She began to feel at ease in his presence; she began to perceive that here was a thoroughly noble nature, a mind so lofty and liberal that even

had the man known her pitiful sordid story he would have been more inclined to compassionate than to condemn.

Having recovered her favourite nephew, after so long a severance, Aunt Betsy was in no wise disposed to let him go. She insisted upon his staying to dinner; and before the evening was over Ida found herself quite at home with the dreaded master of the Abbey. At Miss Wendover's request she played for nearly an hour, and Brian listened with evident appreciation, sitting at his ease just outside the open window, among the roses and lilies of June, under a moonlit sky. It was a calm, peaceful, rational kind of evening, and Ida's mind was tranquillised by the time it was over; and when she went to her room, after a friendly parting with Miss Wendover's nephew, she told herself that she was not likely to be often troubled with his society. He was too much a lover of learned solitude to be likely to be interested in the small amusements and occupations of the family at The Knoll—too much in the clouds to concern himself with Aunt Betsy's

various endeavours to improve her poorer neighbours in themselves and their surroundings.

She did not long remain under this delusion. She was busy in the garden, with basket and scissors, trimming away fading roses and cankered buds from the luxuriance of bush and standard, arch and trellis, at eleven o'clock next morning, when she heard the garden gate open, and beheld Mr. Wendover, Bessie, and Urania coming across the lawn.

'We are going for a botanical prowl in the woods,' said Bessie, 'and we want you to come with us. You are always anxious to improve your mind, and here is a grand opportunity for you. Brian is a tremendous botanist, and Mr. Jardine is not an ignoramus in that line.'

'Oh, then Mr. Jardine is going to prowl too?' said Ida, smiling at her.

'Yes, he is going to give himself a holiday, for once in a way. Blanche is packing a basket. She and Eva are to have the car, but the rest of us are going to walk. Come along, Ida, just as you are. We are going to grovel and grub

after club-mosses and toad-stools. Your oldest gown is too good.'

'Please wear a white gown, as you did yesterday,' said Brian. 'White has such a lovely effect amidst the lights and shadows of a wood.'

'Isn't it rather too violent a contrast?' argued Urania. 'A faint sage-green, or a pale gray—or even that too lovely terra-cotta red——'

'Flower-pot colour!' screamed Bessie. 'Horrid!'

'I should like to go,' faltered Ida, 'but I have so much to do—an afternoon class—no, it is quite impossible. Thank you very much for thinking of me, all the same.'

'You utterly disagreeable thing!' exclaimed Bessie; and at this moment Miss Wendover came upon the scene, from an adjacent green-house, where she had been working diligently with sponge and watering-pot. She heard the rights and wrongs of the case, and insisted that Ida should go.

'Never mind the afternoon class—I'll take that. You work hard enough, child; you must have a holiday sometimes.'

'I had a holiday yesterday, Aunt Betsy; and really I had rather not go. The day is so very warm, and I have a slight headache already.'

'Go and lose it in the wood, where Rosalind lost her heart-ache. Nothing like a long ramble when one is a little out of sorts. Go and get rid of your basket, and get your sunshade. Where are you going for your botanising?'

'All over the world,' said Bessie; 'just as fancy leads us. If you will promise to meet us anywhere, we'll be there.'

'So be it,' replied Aunt Betsy. 'Suppose we arrange a tea-meeting. I will be ready for you by the Queen Beech, in Framleigh Wood, as the clock strikes five, and we will all come home together. And now run away, before the day gets old. Glad to see you unbending for once in a way, Urania.'

Miss Rylance had been curiously willing to unbend this morning, when Bessie ran in and surprised her at her morning practice with the wonderful tidings of Brian's return. She appeared delighted at the idea of a botanising expedition,

though she cared as little for botany as she did for Hebrew. But when a young lady of large aspirations is compelled to vegetate in a village —even after her presentation at court and introduction into society—she is naturally avid for the society of the one eligible man in the parish.

'Mr. Jardine is coming with us,' Bessie told her, as a further temptation.

Urania gave her hand a little squeeze, and murmured, 'Yes, darling, I'll come; Mr. Jardine is so nice. Will my frock do?'

The frock was of the pre-Raffaelite or Bedford-Parkian order, short-waisted, flowing, and flabby, colour the foliage of a lavender bush, relieved by a broad brick-dust sash. An amber necklace, a large limp Leghorn hat with a sunflower in it, and a pair of long yellow gloves completed Urania's costume.

'Your frock will be spoilt in the woods,' said Bessie; but Urania did not mean to do much botanical work, and was not afraid of spoiling her frock.

They found Mr. Jardine waiting for them at the churchyard gate, and to him Bessie presented her cousin, somewhat reversing the ceremonial order of things, since Brian Wendover was the patron of the living, and could have made John Jardine vicar on the arising of a vacancy.

Brian and the Curate walked on ahead with Miss Rylance, who seemed bent upon keeping them both in conversation, and Bessie fell back a little way with Ida.

'You dearest darling,' she exclaimed, squeezing her arm rapturously.

'What has happened, Bess? Why such unusual radiance?'

'Do you suppose I am not glad of Brian's return?'

'I thought you liked the other one best?'

'Well, yes; one is more at home with him, don't you see. This one was a double-first—got the Ireland Scholarship. Why Ireland, when it was at Oxford he got it? He is awfully learned; knows Greek plays by heart, just as that sweet Mr. Brandram who came last winter to read for

the new school-house knows Shakespeare. But I am very fond of him, all the same; and oh, Ida, what a too heavenly thing it would be if he were to fall in love with you!'

'Bessie!' exclaimed Ida, with an indignant frown.

'Don't look so angry. You should have heard how he spoke of you this morning at breakfast; such praise! Approbation from Sir Hubert What's-his-name is praise indeed, don't you know. There's Shakespeare for you!' added Bessie, whose knowledge of polite literature had its limits.

'Bessie, you contrived once—meaning no harm, of course—to give me great pain, to humiliate me to the very dust,' said Ida, seriously. 'Let us have no more such fooling. Your cousin is—your cousin—quite out of my sphere. However civil he may be to me, however kindly he may speak of me, he can never be any more to me than he is at this moment.'

'Very well,' said Bess, meekly, 'I will be as silent as the grave. I don't think I said anything very offensive, but—I apologise. Do you think

you would very much mind kissing me, just as if nothing had happened?'

Ida clasped the lovable damsel in her arms and kissed her warmly. And now Mr. Jardine turned back and joined them, at the entrance to a wood supposed to be particularly rich in mosses, flowers, and fungi. Urania still absorbed the attention of Mr. Wendover, who strolled by her side and listened somewhat languidly to her disquisitions upon various phases of modern thought.

'What a beautiful girl Bessie has discovered for her bosom friend,' he said, presently.

'Miss Palliser; yes, she is quite too lovely, is she not?' said Urania, with that air of heartiness which every well-trained young woman assumes when she discusses a rival beauty; 'but she has not the purity of the early Italian manner. It is a Carlo-Dolci face—the beauty of the Florentine decadence. I was at school with her.'

'So I understood. Were you great friends?'

'No,' replied Miss Rylance, decisively; 'if we had been at school for as many years as it took to evolve man from the lowest of the vertebrata we should not have been friends.'

'I understand. The thousandth part of an inch, unbridged, is as metaphysically impassable as the gulf which divides us from the farthest nebula. In your case there was no conveying medium, no sympathy to draw you together,' said Brian, answering the young lady in her own coin.

She glanced at him doubtfully, rather inclined to think he was laughing at her, if any one could laugh at Miss Rylance.

'She was frankly detestable,' said Urania. 'I endure her here for Bessie's sake; just as I would endure the ungraceful curves of a Dachshund if Bess took it into her head to make a pet of one; but at school I could keep her at a distance.'

'What has she done to offend you?'

'Done? nothing. She exists, that is quite enough. Her whole nature—her moral being—is antagonistic to mine. What is your opinion of a young woman who declares in cold blood that she means to marry for money?'

'Not a pleasant avowal from such lips, certainly,' said Brian. 'She may have been only joking.'

'After events showed that she was in earnest.'

'How so? Has she married for money? I thought she was still Miss Palliser?'

'She is; but that is not her fault. She tried her hardest to secure a husband whom she supposed to be rich.'

And then Miss Rylance told how in frolic mood his penniless cousin had been palmed upon Miss Palliser as the owner of the Abbey; how she had fallen readily into the trap, and had carried on a clandestine acquaintance which had resulted in her expulsion from the school where she had filled the subordinate position of pupil-teacher.

'I have heard most of this before, from Bessie, but not the full particulars of the practical joke which put Brian Walford in my shoes,' said Mr. Wendover.

He felt more shocked, more wounded than there was need for him to feel, perhaps; but the girl's beauty had charmed him, and he was prepared to think her a goddess.

'How do you know that Miss Palliser did not like my cousin for his own sake?' he speculated presently. 'Brian Walford is a very nice fellow.'

'She did not like him well enough to marry him when she knew the truth,' replied Urania. 'I believe the poor fellow was passionately in love with her. She encouraged him, fooled him to the top of his bent, and then flung him over directly she found he was not the rich Mr. Wendover. He has never been to Kingthorpe since. That would show how deeply he was wounded.'

'The fooling was not all on her side,' said Mr. Wendover. 'She had a right to resent the trick that had been played upon her. I am surprised that Bessie could lend herself to such a mean attempt to put her friend at a disadvantage.'

'Oh, I am sure Bessie meant only the most innocent fun; her tremendous animal spirits carry her away sometimes, don't you know! And then, again, she thinks her chosen friend perfection. She could not understand that Miss Palliser could really marry a man for the sake of his houses and lands. *I* knew her better.'

'And it was you who hatched the plot, I think,' said Brian.

Miss Rylance had not been prepared to admit

as much. She intended Bessie to bear whatever blame there might be attached to the escapade in Mr. Wendover's mind; but it seemed from this remark of his that Bessie had betrayed her.

'I may have thrown out the idea when your cousin suddenly appeared upon the scene. We were all in wild spirits that day. And really Miss Palliser had made herself very absurd by her romantic admiration of the Abbey.'

'Well, I hope this young lady-like conspiracy did no harm,' said Brian; 'but I have a hearty abhorrence of all practical jokes.'

They were in a deep, rutty lane by this time, a lane with banks rich in ferns and floral growth, and here came Blanche and Eva and the youngest boy, released from Latin grammar and Greek delectus at an earlier hour than usual. The car was sent on to the wood, and Bessie and her two sisters produced their fern trowels, and began digging and delving for rare specimens—real or imaginary—assisted by Mr. Jardine, who had more knowledge but less enthusiasm than the girls.

'I can't think what you can want with more

ferns,' said Urania, disdainfully; 'every corner at The Knoll has its fernery.'

'Oh, but one can't have too much of a good thing; and then there is the pleasure of looking for them. Aren't you going to hunt for anything?'

'Thanks, no. It is a day for basking rather than work. Shall we go to the end of the lane—there is a lovely view from there—and sit and bask?'

'With all my heart,' replied Mr. Wendover. 'Come, Miss Palliser, of course you'll join the basking detachment.'

Urania would have liked to leave Ida out of the business, but she smiled sweetly at Mr. Wendover's speech, and they all three strolled to the end of the lane, which ascended all the way, till they found themselves upon a fine upland, with a lovely view of woodland and valley stretching away towards Alresford. Here in the warm June sunshine they seated themselves on a ferny bank to wait for the diggers and delvers below. It was verily weather in which to bask was quite the most rapturous employment. The orchestral harmonies of summer insects made a low drowsy music round them,

There was just enough air to faintly stir the petals of the dog-roses without blowing them from their frail stems. The dazzling light above, the cool verdure around, made a delicious contrast. Ida looked dreamily across the bold grassy downs, with here and there a patch of white, which shone like a jewel in the sun. It was very pleasant to sit here —very pleasant to listen to Brian Wendovers' description of Norway and the Norwegians. A book of travels might have been ever so much better, perhaps; but there was a charm in these vivid pictures of recent experiences which no printed page could have conveyed. And then the talk was delightfully desultory, now touching upon literature, now upon art, now even descending to family reminiscences, stories of the time when Brian had been a Winchester boy, as his cousins were now, and his happy hunting grounds had been among these hills.

Ida talked very little. She was disposed to be silent, but had it been otherwise she would have found slight opportunity for conversation. Miss Rylance, educated up to the standard of

good professional society, was ready to give her opinions upon anything between heaven and earth, from the spectrum analysis of the sun's rays to the latest discovery in the habits of ants. She did not mean Ida to shine, and she so usurped the conversation that Miss Palliser's opinions and ideas remained a blank to Mr. Wendover.

Yet a glance at Ida's face now and then told him that she was not unintelligent, and by the time that summer day was over, and they all sat round the gipsy tea-kettle in the wood, with Aunt Betsy presiding over the feast, Mr. Wendover felt as if he knew a good deal about Miss Palliser. They had talked, and walked, and botanised together in the wood, in spite of Miss Rylance; and Urania felt somehow that the day had been a failure. She had made up her mind long ago that Mr. Wendover of the Abbey was just the one person in Hampshire whom she could allow herself to marry. Anyone else in that locality was impossible.

Under these circumstances it was trying to behold Mr. Wendover laying himself, as it were,

at the feet of a poor dependent and hanger-on of his family, merely because that young person happened to be handsome. He could have no ulterior views; he was only revealing that innate shallowness and frivolity of the masculine mind which allows even the wisest man to be caught by a pair of fine eyes, a Grecian nose, and a brilliant complexion. Mr. Wendover was no doubt a great deal too wise to have any serious ideas about such a person as Ida Palliser; but he liked to talk to her, he liked to watch the sensitive colour come and go upon the perfect oval of her cheek, while the dark eye brightened or clouded with every change of feeling; and while he was yielding to these vulgar distractions there was no chance of his falling in love with Urania Rylance.

It was a crushing blow to Miss Rylance when a little conversation at tea-time showed that Mr. Wendover was not disposed to think Miss Palliser altogether a nobody, and that a young woman who earned a salary as a useful companion might belong to a better family than Miss Rylance could boast.

'I have heard your name before to-day, Miss Palliser,' said Brian. 'Is your father any relation to Sir Vernon Palliser?'

'Sir Vernon is my father's nephew.'

'Indeed. Then your father is the Captain Palliser of whom I've heard Vernon and Peter Palliser talk sometimes. Your cousins are members of the Alpine Club, and of the Travellers', and we have often met. Capital fellows, both of them.'

'I have never seen them,' said Ida, 'so much of my life has been spent at school. Sir Vernon and his brother went to see my father and stepmother last October, and made a very good impression. But that is all I know of them.'

A baronet for a first cousin, and she had never mentioned the fact at Mauleverer, where it would have scored high. What an unaccountable kind of girl, and quite wanting in human feeling, thought Urania, listening intently, though pretending to be interested in a vehement discussion between Blanche and Bessie as to whether a certain puffy excrescence was or was not a beef-

steak fungus, and should or should not be cooked for dinner.

'Do you know your cousin's Sussex property? Have you ever been at Wimperfield?' inquired Brian.

'Never. I have heard my father say it is a lovely place, a little way beyond Petersfield.'

'Yes, I know every inch of the country round. It is charming.'

'It cannot be prettier than this,' said Ida, with conviction.

'I hardly agree with you there. It is a wilder and more varied landscape. Hampshire has nothing so picturesque on this side of the New Forest. If Sir Vernon and his brother are at Wimperfield this summer, we might make up a party and drive over to see the place. I know he would give us a hearty welcome.'

Ida was silent, but Aunt Betsy and her niece declared that it was a splendid idea of Brian's, and must certainly be carried out.

'Fancy Brian introducing Ida to her cousin!' exclaimed Bessie. 'Would it not be quite too

deliciously absurd? Sir Vernon Palliser, permit me to introduce you to your first cousin!'

And then Bessie, who was an incorrigible match-maker where Ida was concerned, began to think what a happy thing it would be if Sir Vernon Palliser were to fall in love with his cousin, and incontinently propose to make her mistress of this delightful place near Petersfield.

They all walked back to Kingthorpe together, and parted at the Homestead gate.

Miss Rylance, who hated woods, wild-flowers, ferns, and toadstools, and all the accompaniments of rustic life, went back to her æsthetic drawing-room in a savage humour, albeit that fine training which comes of advanced civilisation enabled her to part from her friends with endearing smiles.

She expected her father that evening, and she was looking forward to the refreshment of hearing of that metropolis which suited her so much better than Hampshire hills and woods; nay, there was even the possibility that he might bring someone down with him, as it was his custom to do now and then. But instead of Dr. Rylance she found an

orange-coloured envelope upon the hall table containing an apologetic message.

'Sorry to disappoint you. Have been persuaded to go to first representation of new play at Lyceum, with Lady Jinks and the Titmarshes. All London will be there.'

'And I am buried alive in this loathsome hole, where nobody cares a straw about me,' cried Urania, banging her bed-room door, and flinging herself upon her luxurious sofa in as despairing an attitude as if it had been the straw pallet of a condemned cell.

From the very beginning of things she had hated Ida Palliser, with the jealous hatred of conscious inferiority. She who had made up her mind to go through life as a superior being, to be always on the top rung of the social ladder, found herself easily distanced by the penniless pupil-teacher. This had been bitter to bear even at Mauleverer, where that snobbish feeling which prevails among schoolgirls had allowed the fashionable physician's daughter a certain superiority over the penniless beauty. But here, at Kingthorpe, where rustic

ignorance was ready to worship beauty and talent for their own sakes, it was still harder for Urania to assert her superiority; while in the depths of her inner consciousness lurked the uncomfortable conviction that she was in many ways inferior to her rival. And now that she discovered Ida Palliser's near relationship to a baronet of old family, owner of a fine property within thirty miles of Kingthorpe, Urania began to feel that she must needs be distanced in the race. She might have held her own against the shabby half-pay captain's daughter, but Sir Vernon Palliser's first cousin was quite a different person. If Brian Wendover admired Ida, her lack of fortune was hardly likely to influence him, seeing that in family she was his equal. Such a man might have shrunk from allying himself with a woman of obscure parentage and vulgar associations; but to a man of Brian Wendover's liberal mind and ample fortune Ida Palliser would no doubt seem as suitable a match as the daughter of a duke.

Miss Rylance had grown worldly-wise since her introduction to London society, that particular

and agreeable section of upper-middle class life which prides itself upon cleverness rather than wealth, and which spices its conversation with a good deal of smart personality. She had formed a more correct estimate of life in general, and her father's position in particular, and had acquired a keener sense of proportion than she had learnt at Mauleverer Manor. She had learnt that Dr. Rylance, of Cavendish Square, was not quite such a great man as she had supposed in the ignorant faith of her girlhood. She had discovered that his greatness was at best a kind of lap-dog or tame cat distinction; that he was better known as the caressed and petted adviser of patrician dowagers and effeminate old gentlemen, of fashionable beauties and hysterical matrons, than as one of the lights of his profession. He was a clever specialist, who had made his fortune by half-a-dozen prescriptions as harmless as Morrison's pills, and who owed more to the grace of his manner and the excellence of his laundress and his tailor, than to his original discoveries in the grandest science of the age. Other people made discoveries, and Dr. Rylance

talked about them; and he was so quick in his absorption of every new idea, so glib in his exposition of every new theory, that his patients swore by him as a man in the front rank of modern thought and scientific development. He was a clever man, and he had a large belief in the great healer Nature, so he rarely did much harm; while his careful consideration of every word his patients said to him, his earnest countenance and thoughtful brow, taken in conjunction with his immaculate shirt-front and shapely white hand, rarely failed to make a favourable impression.

He was a comfortable physician, lenient in the article of diet, exacting only moderate sacrifices from the high liver. His Hygeia was not a severe goddess—rather a friendly matron of the monthly-nurse type, who adapted herself to circumstances.

'We have been taking a pint of Cliquot every day at luncheon, and we don't feel that we could eat any luncheon without it. Well, well, suppose we try about half the quantity, very dry, and make an effort to eat a cutlet or a little bit of plain roast mutton,' Dr. Rylance would murmur tenderly

to a stout middle-aged lady who had confessed that her appetite was inferior to her powers of absorption. Men who were drinking themselves to death in a gentlemanly manner always went to Dr. Rylance. He did not make their lives a burden to them by an impossible regimen: he kept them alive as long as he could, and made departure as gradual and as easy as possible; but his was no kill-or-cure system; he was not a man for heroic remedies. And now Urania had found that her father was not a great man—that he was praised and petted, and had made his nest in the purple and velvet of this world, but that he was not looked up to or pointed at as one of the beacon-lights on the coast-line of the age—and that he being so small a Somebody, she his daughter was very little more than Nobody. Knowing this, she had made up her mind that whenever Brian Wendover of the Abbey should appear upon the scene, she would do her uttermost to make him her captive.

CHAPTER V.

MR. WENDOVER PLANS AN EXCURSION.

THE happy summer glided by—the season of roses and butterflies, strawberries and cream, haymaking, lawn tennis, picnics, gipsy teas—an idle, joyous life under blue skies. The Knoll family gave themselves up heart and soul to summer pleasures—simple joys which were at once innocent and inexpensive—and Ida Palliser found herself a sharer in all these holiday rambles. Conscience told her that she had no right to be there, that she was an impostor sailing under false colours. Conscience, speaking more loudly, told her that she had no right to accept Brian Wendover's quiet homage, no right to be so happy in his company day after day; for there were few of their summer joys in which he was not among them. Bessie was warm in her praises of him, full of wonder at his having developed into such a companionable being.

'Norway has done him good,' she said. 'He used to be such a reserved creature, dawdling away day after day in his library, poring over Greek and Latin, and now he is almost as companionable as Brian Walford.'

'He'll have to live a good many years before he's up to B. W.,' said Horace, who had walked across the hills for an afternoon at home and the chance of a tip. 'B. W. knows every music-hall in London, and can sing a topical song as well as men who get their sixty pounds a week.'

'I wish you wouldn't put on that knowing air. What do you know of men who get sixty pounds a week?' exclaimed Bessie, contemptuously.

'As much as you do, anyhow,' answered her brother.

Ida made many faint efforts to keep aloof from the summer revelries, but Miss Wendover insisted upon her enjoying herself with the others. She had been such a conscientious and devoted coadjutor in all Aunt Betsy's good works, she had been so thoroughly energetic and industrious, never relaxing her efforts or growing weary of labour,

that it seemed only right and fair that she should enjoy the summer holiday-time, the blessed season when every day was full of temptations.

'Enjoy yourself to your heart's content, my dear,' said Aunt Betsy. 'Our English summers are so short that if we do not make the most of the bright warm days while they are with us, we have to endure all the pangs of remorse through a rainy autumn and a cold winter.'

Not only did Miss Wendover give this generous advice, but she herself joined in many of their expeditions, and her presence was always a source of pleasure. She was so genial, so hearty, so thoroughly well-informed, and yet so modest in the use of her knowledge, that the young people loved to have her with them. Her enjoyment of the free, roving life was almost as keen as theirs, while her capacity for planning an agreeable day, and her foresight in the commissariat department, far exceeded that of youth. And so, and so, June and July drifted by, and it was the beginning of August, and Ida felt as if she had known Mr. Wendover of the Abbey all her life.

What did she know of him after two months of almost daily association? She knew that no unworthy thought ever found utterance upon his lips; that no vulgar instinct ever showed itself in his conduct; that he was essentially to the very core of his heart a gentleman; that without any high-flown affectation of chivalry he was as chivalrous as Bayard; that without any languid airs and graces of the modern æsthetic school he was a man of the highest and broadest culture; and that, oh *rara avis* among modern scholars and young laymen, he was honestly and unaffectedly religious, a staunch Anglican of the school of Pusey, and not ashamed to confess his faith at all times and seasons. In this day, when the majority of young men affect to regard the services of their church as an intolerable bore, only endured as a concession to the weaklings of the inferior sex, it was pleasant to see the master of the Abbey a regular attendant at his parish church, an earnest and frequent worshipper at the altar at which his parents and progenitors had knelt before him.

This much and a great deal more had Ida Palliser discovered of the man whom nearly a year ago her fancy had exalted into an ideal character. It was strange to find her most romantic visions realised; strange, but a strangeness not without pain. He was full of kindness and friendliness for her whenever they met; but she told herself that his manner to her involved no more than kindly feeling and friendliness. To imagine anything beyond this was foolhardiness and vanity. And yet there were times when she felt she had no right to be in his society—that every day she spent at Kingthorpe was an offence against honour and right feeling.

One August afternoon Ida had, for once in a way, succeeded in making her domestic occupations an excuse for absenting herself from what Bessie called a 'barrow-hunt' on the downs, Brian Wendover being a great authority upon this ancient form of sepulture, and discoursing eloquently on those widely different races whose funeral chambers are hidden under the long and the round barrow.

The day, closely as Ida had been occupied, had seemed just a little dreary, certainly much duller than such days had been wont to seem before Brian's return to the Abbey: yet she was glad to be alone; it was a relief even to be a trifle melancholy, rather than to enjoy that happiness which was always blended with a faint consciousness of wrong-doing. And now the slow day was nearly over: she had worked at the village girls'-school in the morning; she had lectured upon domestic economy to a class of incipient housemaids and scullery maids after luncheon; and now at five o'clock she was sitting in a basket-chair in the rose-wreathed verandah working at the swallows and bulrushes upon that elaborate design which she had begun before Christmas, for the adornment of Miss Wendover's piano.

It was a deliciously drowsy afternoon, but Ida's active brain was not prone to slumber. She sat working diligently, and thinking deeply, when a shadow came between her and the sunshine, and on looking up she saw Mr. Wendover standing before her.

'How do you do? Have they all come home?' she asked, laying aside her work on the convenient basket table, and preparing to welcome Aunt Betsy.

'I have not been with them—at least not since the morning,' answered Brian. 'I left Bessie to hunt out her own barrows; she is so lazy-minded that as long as I do all the pointing she will never know the true barrow from the natural lumpiness of the soil. Besides, she has Aunt Betsy, a tower of strength in all things.'

'And Miss Rylance, I suppose?'

'No, Miss Rylance thought there would be too much walking for her, or for Pinet. I have been at the Abbey all day, getting up my arrears of correspondence. This fine weather has made me incorrigibly idle. After I had written about a score of letters I thought myself entitled to a little rest and refreshment, so I strolled over here to tell you some news, and to ask you for a cup of tea.'

'You shall have some tea directly,' said Ida, going indoors to ring the bell, an act in which she was naturally anticipated by her guest. 'What

news can you possibly have that concerns me?' she asked, when they had come back to the verandah. 'I know by your face that it is not bad news.'

'God forbid I should ever have to tell you that. I think it would hurt me more than you,' said Brian, with an earnestness which brought the crimson glow into Ida's cheeks and made her bend a little lower over the swallows in her crewel-work. 'No, this is pleasant news, I hope. I wrote to Vernon Palliser more than a month ago to propose that I should drive you and a lot of people over to luncheon. He was in Switzerland, as usual, and I had no answer to my letter till the second post to-day, when I received a most hearty invitation to bring my party immediately. But you shall hear your cousin's own words.'

Mr. Wendover produced the letter, and read as follows,—

'"I shall be delighted to make my cousin's acquaintance. She was in England when I last saw her father at his retreat near Dieppe. Bring her as soon as you can, and with as large a party as you like—the larger the better, and the sooner

the better—as Peter and I will most likely be on the wing again for Scotland soon after the twelfth. We shall come back for the partridges, which I hear are abundant. The road is rather intricate, so you had better bring your ordnance-map, but pretty fair in dry weather like this; and you'll come through some lovely scenery. Telegraph your time, and Peter and I will be in the way to welcome you!'"

'What do you say to our going to-morrow? I waited to know what you would like, before I telegraphed.'

'You are very good: but there are others to be consulted,' replied Ida, with her head still bent over her work.

Good manners demanded that she should look at him, but at this particular moment she felt it quite impossible to be mannerly. He had said nothing of a thrilling nature, yet his whole tone and expression, his air of deferential regard, stirred a new feeling in her mind—the conviction that he cared for her more than it was well for either of them that he should care.

'You are the first person to be consulted,' he said; 'would you like to go to-morrow?'

'I will go whenever the others like,' answered Ida, still intent upon the shading of her swallows' wing, 'but I really think you had better leave me out of your party—I have wasted so much time roaming about—and there are so many things I want to finish before the summer is over.'

'That elaborate arrangement in swallows and rushes, for instance,' said Brian, laughingly; 'you are working at it as if for a wager. Perhaps it is a wager—so many stitches in so many consecutive days—is that it? No, Miss Palliser, your swallows must wait. The party has been planned on your account, and to leave you at home would be like leaving Hamlet out of the play. Besides, I thought you would like to see your cousins and your ancestral halls.'

'I shall be very glad to see my cousins, for my father likes them very much; but I do not feel any thrilling interest in the ancestral halls.'

'And yet your father was born there.'

'Yes, that is a reason for being interested in

Wimperfield. But my father has so seldom talked about his birthplace. He speaks a great deal more of India. That life in a strange far-away land seems to have blotted out the memory of his childhood. He talks of Addiscomb sometimes, but hardly ever of Wimperfield.'

She laid aside her work as the youthful butler brought out the tea-table. It was no new thing for her to pour out Mr. Wendover's tea, since it was his custom to drop in at his aunt's very often at this hour, when the day had not been given up to excursionising; but it was new for her to be alone with him at this social meal, and she found herelf longing ardently for Aunt Betsy's return.

She who could have found so much to talk about had her mind been at ease, was curiously silent as she handed Mr. Wendover his tea, and offered the cake and fruit, which always accompanied the meal at the Homestead. Her heart was beating much faster than it should have done, and she was considering whether it was worth while to place herself in the way of feeling the

pain, the hidden shame, the sense of falsehood which oppressed her at this moment; whether it would not be better to run any risk, even the hazard of offending Betsy Wendover, the kindest friend she had in the world, rather than remain in her present position.

One thing she could have done which would have given her immediate extrication, and that which seemed the most natural thing to do. She could have told the truth—told Betsy Wendover all about her unlucky marriage. But she would rather have killed herself than do this one righteous thing; for she thought that if her marriage were once known to Brian's relations she would be compelled to assum her natural position as his wife. So long as the marriage remained a secret to all the world except those two whom it most concerned they were free to ignore the tie. They could live their lives apart; and to the end of time it might be as if such a marriage had never been. Her husband being consentient to this life-long separation, her lot might be fairly happy. She

had never tried to penetrate the future. Perhaps to-day for the first time there had flashed into her mind the thought of what a bright and glorious future might have been hers, had she not so forfeited her freedom.

Voices, at least half a dozen, all talking at once, told her that the barrow-hunt was winding homewards; gleams of colour athwart the hedges told her that the hunters were in the lane; and in a minute or two Miss Wendover and her young kinsfolk appeared, all more or less sunburnt and towzled by their tramp across the downs.

'Found a splendid long barrow,' said Bessie, 'on a lovely point, one of the finest views in the county. What clever corpses they must have been to pick such glorious spots! Long barrow, long-headed race, dolichocephalic skulls, men of the stone age, eh?' she said, looking at Brian. 'You see I know my lesson; but it was very mean of you not to come with us, all the same.'

'I wanted you to exercise your own acumen,

to cultivate the antiquarian *flair*. Besides, I had a heap of letters to write.'

'You only found that out after we had started. You never have letters to write when Ida is with us,' said Bessie; a remark which made two people blush. 'To think that I had known that spot all my life and never suspected a barrow,' she continued. 'I thought it was only a convenient bank which Providence had thrown up ready for picnics.'

Ida had enough to do now in providing for the wants of half a dozen hungry people. Blanche of the short petticoats was at an age when girls are ogres, distinguished for nothing but the rapidity of their digestion and the length of their legs. There was a demand for jam, and the unsophisticated half-gallon loaf instead of the conventional thin bread and butter.

'Eat as much as you like, dears,' said Aunt Betsy, 'but remember that your father will expect you to have some appetite at seven.

'We won't disappoint him,' said Bessie; 'seven is an hour and half from now. Blanche can do wonders in an hour and a half.'

Blanche's appetite was one of the stock family jokes, like Urania's tight boots; so there was a laugh, and the others went on eating.

Brian Wendover told them about to-morrow's excursion.

'I shall put four horses into the wagonette,' he said. 'I almost wish I had a drag to do honour to the occasion; but we must resign ourselves to a wagonette. You will go, of course, Aunt Betsy? and Bessie must come; and I suppose we ought to invite Miss Rylance. She has joined in most of our excursions, and it would be invidious to leave her out of this. And I daresay Bessie would think the whole thing flat without Mr. Jardine?'

'It's very kind of you to think of him; but I don't believe he'll be able to spare the day,' said Bessie.

'We'll ask him, at any rate, and then you can't say we've used you badly. That makes a party of six. I'll go and telegraph to Sir Vernon.'

'Will there be lawn-tennis after lunch?' asked Blanche, with a very long face.

'I shouldn't wonder if there were,' answered Brian; 'does that mean that you want to go?'

'I shall not have a creature to speak to at home, and I never go anywhere,' said Blanche, despairingly.

Both statements were obvious untruths, but no doubt the damsel herself believed them.

'Have you a gown that covers your knees?' asked Aunt Betsy, severely.

'My new frock is awfully long. It only came from the dressmaker's last week.'

'Then you have hardly had time to grow out of it,' said Brian. 'Suppose we strain a point, Aunt Betsy, and take her. It will enable us to say, "we are seven."'

'We shall be a tremendous party,' said Miss Wendover. 'I hope Sir Vernon is a hospitable, easy-going man, and that your intimacy with him warrants such an intrusion.'

'I am taking him a cousin,' answered Brian, stealing an admiring glance at Ida: 'surely that ought to secure our welcome.'

'I hope his housekeeper has large ideas about

luncheon,' said Bessie, 'or Blanche's appetite will throw her out in her calculations. If she is the sort of person who thinks a pair of ducklings and a dish of rissoles substantial fare for a large party, I pity her.'

'You're vastly witty,' said Blanche, preparing her final slice of bread and jam; 'one would think you lived upon roses and lilies, like the ascetics.'

'The poor child means æsthetes,' explained Bessie.

'Bother the pronunciation! But if people had seen you eating rabbit-pie on the barrow—why a wolf wouldn't have been in it,' concluded Blanche, who acquired her flowers of speech from the Wintonians.

'I'll go and despatch my telegram,' said Brian, taking up his hat.

CHAPTER VI.

THICKER THAN WATER.

THE weather was altogether favourable for the thirty-mile drive. The wagonette, with its scratch team and a couple of smart grooms, was at the Homestead gate at ten o'clock, and after picking up Miss Wendover and her companion, went on to The Knoll for Bessie and Blanche, and then to Dr. Rylance's for Urania, who had accepted the invitation most graciously. Kingthorpe was unwontedly excited by this gorgeous apparition, and the inhabitants remained at garden gates and cottage doors while so much as a horse's tail was visible. Everybody was pleased to see the young squire driving four-in-hand. It had been supposed that as a bookish young man, given over to Greek and Latin, he must needs be a poor hand with horses. But this morning's exhibition gave rise to more hopeful views.

'We shall see the squire setting up his coach, and settling down at the Abbey,' said one.

'Ay, when he gets married,' said another, 'that's what'll settle he. I believes as him is sweet on that young 'ooman at the Homestead. Her be a clipper, her be.'

Over the hills and far away went the scratch team—a little fresh, but behaving beautifully. Aunt Betsy sat beside her nephew, and watched his coachmanship with a jealous eye, conscious that she could have kept the team better in hand herself, but still with moderate approval. The girls and the grooms were in the back of the vehicle—Bessie, Blanche, and Ida full of talk and merriment, Urania thoughtful. This day's entertainment was too much in Ida's honour to be pleasant to Miss Rylance; yet she could not deny herself the painful privilege of being there. She wanted to see what happened—how far Mr. Wendover was disposed to make an idiot of himself. She saw more than enough in the glances of the charioteer, when he turned to talk to the girls behind him; now to point out some

feature in the landscape, now to ask some idle question, but always with looks that lingered upon one face, and that face was Ida Palliser's.

It was a long cross country drive, by rustic lanes and dubious roads, but Mr. Wendover took things easily. He had sent forward a second scratch team over night to a village half way, and here they changed horses, while he and his party spent half an hour pleasantly enough exploring an old gray church and humble graveyard, where the tombstones all bore record of unrenowned lives that had slowly rusted away in a pastoral solitude. Blanche, whose schoolroom appetite was wont to damp its keen edge upon bread and butter at this hour, felt it rather a hard thing that no one proposed a light refection at the lowly inn; but she bore her inward gnawings in silence, conscious of the dignity of a frock which almost reached her ankles, and desirous to prove that she was worthy to be the associate of grown-ups.

Half way between this village inn and Wimperfield they met a couple of horsemen. These were no other than Sir Vernon and his

brother Peter, who had come to meet their guests, and show them the nearest way, which from this point became especially intricate.

Brian walked his team gently up a gentle hill, while Sir Vernon and his brother walked their horses beside him, and during this ascent all necessary introductions were duly made, everybody being properly presented except Blanche, who felt that she was being treated with contumely.

'I am very glad to see you at last, cousin Ida,' said Sir Vernon, pleasantly. 'I have been hearing of you all my life, but we seemed fated not to meet.'

He was a fine broad-shouldered young fellow, with a frank, fresh-coloured countenance, auburn whiskers, and curly brown hair. His brother was after the same pattern, hair a little lighter, no whiskers, eyes rather a brighter blue. They were as much alike as brothers can be without being mistaken for each other. There was nothing romantic looking about either of them, Bessie thought, regretfully. She would have liked Sir Vernon to have resembled her favourite hero in

fiction (the man she always put in confession books), and to have fallen desperately in love with Ida at first sight. And here he was, a most matter-of-fact looking young man, riding behind the wagonette in a provokingly matter-of-fact way.

Yet perhaps there was a providence in this; for if Brian of the Abbey were in love with Ida, as Bessie shrewdly suspected, it would have been a terrible thing for him to have found a rival in a titled cousin. If Ida were ambitious, the title might have turned the scale.

'And I have so set my heart upon having her for my cousin,' thought Bessie. 'The other Brian was a failure, but this Brian may win the prize.'

Mr. Jardine had not been able to leave his parish for a long day; so Bessie had plenty of leisure to speculate upon the possible loves of other people, instead of enjoying the blissfulness of her own love affair.

Wimperfield was a mansion built in the Italian manner which prevailed about a century ago, a

style about as uninteresting as any order of domestic architecture, but which makes a house a good feature in a fine landscape. The Corinthian façade of Wimperfield stood boldly out against the verdant slope of a hill, backed and sheltered on either side by woods. Behind that classic portico there was the usual prim range of windows, and there were the usual barrack-like rooms. The furniture was of the same heavy and substantial character, rich dark rosewood, amber satin hangings faded by a quarter of a century; Spanish mahogany in dining-rooms and bed-rooms; Gillow's fine workmanship everywhere, but the style dating back to the very infancy of that ancient house.

The large, finely-lighted hall, which looked like the vestibule of some learned institute, was adorned with four Carrara marble statues, placid gods and goddesses smirking at vacancy, on pedestals of verde antico. The only pictures in the reception-rooms were family portraits, and a few of those large Dutch landscapes, battle scenes, sea-pieces and fruit-pieces, which cry aloud that

they are furniture pictures, and have been bought to fit the panelling of the rooms.

But for its noble situation this temple of English domestic life would have been utterly without charm; but the situation was superb, the gardens were in beautiful order, and the stables, as Aunt Betsy declared after personal inspection, were perfect.

Sir Vernon did the honours of his house in a frank, friendly manner. He took his guests round the gardens and stables, showed Ida the old nursery in which his father and her father had spent their infancy; the gun-room in which their first guns were carefully preserved; the very rocking-horse on which they had ridden, and which now occupied a recess in an obscure lobby opening into the garden.

'Peter and I didn't care to ride him,' said Sir Vernon. 'We had Shelties when we were three-year-olds; but I know when I began Virgil I used to think the wooden horse that got into Troy was an exaggerated copy of this one.'

He showed his cousin the room in which her

grandfather and grandmother died—an immense apartment, wherein stood, grim and tall, a gigantic mahogany four-poster, draped with dark green velvet.

'I can't fancy anybody doing anything else in such a room,' said Ida, to whom the spacious chamber looked as gloomy as a charnel-house. 'I beg your pardon. I hope you don't sleep here.'

'No, my diggings are at the other end of the house, looking into the stable-yard. I like to be able to put my head out of window and order my horse—saves time and trouble. We keep the rooms at this end for visitors.'

The gong boomed loud and long, much to the relief of poor Blanche, whose spirits had been slowly sinking, in unison with her inward cravings, and who had begun to think that the promised luncheon was a delusion and a snare, which would end in the fashionable frivolity of afternoon tea.

Sir Vernon offered his arm to Miss Wendover, and asked Brian to take Miss Palliser, while Peter was told off to Miss Rylance, leaving Bessie and the clinging Blanche like twin cherries on one stem. It was curious for Ida to find herself

seated presently beside the wealthy cousin of whom she had heard as a far-off and almost mythical personage, of very little account in her life; since it was so improbable that any of his wealth would ever come her way.

The luncheon was of the old-fashioned and ponderous order, excellent of its kind: the orchard-houses had given up their finest peaches and nectarines and their earliest grapes to do honour to the occasion. Miss Rylance contemplated the table decorations with mute scorn, which she hardly cared to disguise. No Venetian wine-flasks, no languorous lilies swooning in Salviati goblets, no pottery of the new green and yellow school, but massive silver, and heavy diamond-cut glass—gaudy Staffordshire china of 'too utterly quite' the worst period of art. Everything essentially Philistine.

Sir Vernon had placed his cousin on his left hand, and he talked to her a good deal during luncheon—asking questions as to her past life, which she answered with perfect candour. It was only when he spoke of her future that the

fair brow clouded, and the cheeks reddened with a painful glow.

'I hope, now that the ice has been broken, that we are not going to be strangers any more,' said Vernon, pleasantly. 'To think that you should be such a near neighbour of mine, and that I should know nothing about it! You have been at Kingthorpe since last November, you say? How long are you going to stay there?'

'For a good many Novembers, I hope,' said Aunt Betsy, 'unless she gets tired of rural solitude, or unless a husband steals her away from me.'

'Ah, that is what all young ladies anticipate. They never are but always to be blest,' replied Vernon, laughing. He was one of those open-hearted souls who always appreciate their own mild jokelets.

Brian, who saw Ida's pained expression, made haste to change the conversation, by an inquiry about Sir Vernon's plans for the autumn, which set that gentleman on a sporting tack, and spared Miss Palliser all further trouble.

After luncheon they went to look at the hot-

houses, and dawdled away the time very agreeably until afternoon tea, Miss Rylance doing her best to improve the occasion with Peter, who was not educated up to the standard of metropolitan or South Kensingtonian young ladyhood, and who came out very badly under the process of development; for when talked to about Ruskin he was at first altogether vacuous, but, on being pushed hard, believed there was a biggish swell of some such name among the Oxford dons, about whom he could not fairly be expected to know anything, as he and his brother were Cantabs; while on being languidly asked his opinion of Swinburne's last tragedy, he grew cheerful, and said he had seen him play the King to Irving's Hamlet, and that it was a very fine performance, the actor in question being a good stayer.

The thing was hopeless, and Miss Rylance felt she was wasting herself upon a dolt. After this she hardly took the trouble to suppress her yawns; yet if she had condescended to question Peter about his Alpine adventures, or to talk about his horses, guns, and dogs, she would have found

him lively enough as a companion; but an education of musical 'at homes' and afternoon teas had tuned Miss Rylance's slender pipe to one particular strain, which did not suit everybody's dancing. She was heavy at heart, feeling that the whole business of the day had conduced to Ida Palliser's glorification. To be the daughter of a man born in that substantial family mansion —scion of a respectable old county family—was in itself a distinction far beyond anything Miss Rylance could boast, her grandfather having been a chemist and druggist in an obscure market town, and her father the architect of his own fortunes. She had done her best to forget this fact hitherto, but it was brought home to her mind unpleasantly to-day, when she saw the articled pupil, whose three pairs of stockings had moved her to scornful wonder, strolling about her ancestral home by the side of her first cousin, and that first cousin a baronet of Charles II.'s creation.

Sir Vernon and his brother were full of cordiality for their cousin, full of anticipations

of future meetings, and of hopes that Captain Palliser would come to them in October for what they called a shy at the pheasants.

Ida had good cause to remember that parting in front of the classic portico in the warm afternoon sunlight, the two brothers standing side by side, with frank, bright faces, looking up at their departing guests, all smiles and cheerful pleasure in this world's pleasantest things—a Dandie Dinmont and a big black-and-tan colley looking on at their master's knees—the *beau idéal* of young English manhood — frank, generous, outspoken, fearless—the men who can do and die when the need comes. Her eyes lingered affectionately on that picture as the wagonette drove away by the broad gravel sweep towards the avenue; and those two figures in the sunlight haunted her memory in the days to come.

CHAPTER VII.

OUGHT SHE TO STAY?

A WEEK after the drive to Wimperfield Miss Wendover received a very big box of peaches and grapes, enclosing a very brief letter from Vernon Palliser to his cousin Ida.

'My dear Ida,—I venture to send Miss Wendover some of our fruit,' he wrote, 'for I understood her to say she has not much glass, and grows only flowers. Peter and I are just off to Scotland, where I suppose we shall do a little shooting, and I hope a good deal of yachting and fishing. I wish you and that nice plump little friend of yours—Bessie, I think you called her—were coming to us. Such a jolly life, bobbing about between the islands and the mainland, with the chance of an occasional storm. But I shall look forward to seeing you again in

October, when I hope Miss Wendover will bring you over to stay for a week or two. What splendid ideas she has about summering hunters! never met a more sensible woman. Always your affectionate cousin, VERNON PALLISER.'

Aunt Betsy was pleased with the tribute of hothouse fruit, and even more gratified by that remark about summering horses.

'Your cousin is a fine thoroughbred young fellow,' she said. 'If I had not been fully satisfied you came from a good stock, by my knowledge of your own organization, I should be sure of the fact now I have seen those two young men. They are all that Englishmen ought to be.'

Ida was silent, for to her mind there was one Englishman who more completely realised her ideal of manhood—one who was no less generous and outspoken than her kind young cousins, but whose intellectual gifts, whose highly cultivated mind, and passionate love of all that is most beautiful in life, made him infinitely their superior.

And now came, perhaps, the most bitter trial

of a young life which had already seen more cloud than sunshine. The hour had come when Ida told herself that she must no longer dawdle along the flowery path of sin, no longer palter with fate. Stern duty must be obeyed. She must leave Kingthorpe. It was no longer a question of feeling, but a question of conscience — right against wrong, truth against falsehood, honour against dishonour; for she knew in her heart of hearts that Brian loved her, and that she gave him back his love, measure for measure. He had said nothing definite; she had contrived to ward off anything like a declaration; but she had not been able to prevent his absorbing her society on all possible occasions, taking possession of her, as it were, as of one who belonged to him in the present and the future, deferring to her lightest wish as only a lover defers to his mistress, studying her preferences in everything, and hardly taking the trouble to hide his comparative indifference to the society of other people. It had come to this, and she knew that there must be no further delay.

One evening, when she and Aunt Betsy had been

dining alone, and had returned to the drawing-room, where it was Ida's custom at this hour to play her kind patroness to sleep with all the dreamiest and most pensive melodies in her extensive *répertoire*, the girl suddenly faltered in her playing, wandered from one air into another, and with a touch so uncertain that Aunt Betsy, who was fast lapsing into dreamland, became broad awake again all at once, and wanted to know the reason why.

'Is anything the matter? are you ill, child?' she asked, abruptly.

Ida rose from the piano, where her tears had been dropping on the keys, and came out of the shadowy corner to the verandah, where Aunt Betsy sat among her roses, wrapped in a China crape shawl, one of the gifts of that Indian warrior, Colonel Wendover. August was nearly over, but the weather was still warm enough for sitting out of doors in the twilight.

'What is the matter, Ida? What has happened?' repeated Miss Wendover, with her hand on the girl's shoulder, as she bent to listen to her

Ida was kneeling by Aunt Betsy's side, her head leaning against the arm of her chair, her face hidden.

'Nothing, nothing that you can help or cure, dearest friend,' she answered in a broken voice. 'You must know how good you have been to me. Yes, even you must know that, although it is your nature to make light of your goodness. I think you know I love you and am grateful. Tell me that you believe that before I say another word.'

'I do believe it. Your whole conduct since you have been with me has shown as much,' answered Miss Wendover, calmly. She saw that Ida was powerfully moved, and she wanted to tranquillise her. 'What is the meaning of this preface?'

'Only that I must ask you to let me leave you.'

'Leave me! Oh, you want a holiday, I suppose? that is natural enough. We needn't be tragic about that. You want to go over to Dieppe to see your people?'

'I want to go away from Kingthorpe for ever.'

"For ever? Ah, now we are really tragic!' said Miss Wendover, lightly, her broad, firm white hand tenderly smoothing the girl's hair and brow. 'My dear child, what has gone amiss with you? Something has, I can see. Have you and Miss Rylance quarrelled? I know she is a viper; but I did not think she would play any of her viperish tricks with my property.'

'Miss Rylance has done nothing. I have quarrelled with nobody. I love and honour you and the whole house of Wendover with all my heart and mind. But there is a reason—a reason which I implore you to refrain from asking—why I ought never to have come into your house, as I did come—why I ought to leave it—must leave it for ever!'

'This is very mysterious,' said Aunt Betsy, thinking deeply. 'I could understand a reason—which might exist in a girl's romantic mind—a mistaken generosity, or a mistaken pride—the outcome of late events—which might urge you to run away—like that always wrong-headed and misguided young person, the heroine of a novel;

but what reason there could have been when you came to me last winter against your coming—no —that is more than I can comprehend.'

'You are not to comprehend. It is my secret—my burden—which I must bear. I want you to believe me, that is all,—only to believe me when I say that I love you dearly, and that I have been unspeakably happy in your house—and just quietly let me go and seek my fortune elsewhere—without saying anything to anybody until I am gone.'

'And a nice weeping and wailing there will be from Bessie and her brothers and sisters when you *are* gone!' exclaimed Miss Wendover; 'a pleasant time I shall have of it, with all of them—to say nothing of my own feelings. Do you think it is fair, Ida, to treat me like this; to make yourself pleasant to me, useful, necessary to me—to wind yourself into my heart—and then all at once, with a sudden wrench, to pluck yourself out again, and leave me to do without you? Do you call that fair play?'

'I know that it must seem like base ingratitude,' answered Ida, calm now, with a despairing calm-

ness; 'but I cannot help myself. I am more proud than I can say that you should care for me—that my loving services have not been unwelcome. I know that you took me out of charity; and it is a delight to know that I have not been altogether a bad bargain. But I must go away.'

'I begin to see light,' said Miss Wendover, who had been thinking all this time. 'It's your father's doing. He thinks you are not making a profitable use of your education and talents. He has ordered you to go where you will get a larger salary. But don't let his needs separate us, my dear. I love you better than a few pounds a quarter. I will give you seventy, or even eighty pounds a year, if that will satisfy Captain Palliser.'

'No, no, dear Aunt Betsy. Thank God, my father is not that kind of man. He knows how happy I have been, he is grateful to you for all your goodness to me, and more than content that I should be happy without being a burden to him.'

'Then *why* do you want to leave me?' asked Miss Wendover, with her hands on the

girl's shoulders, her eyes reading the white agonised face looking up at her in the thickening twilight. There was just light enough for her to see the look of intense pain in that pallid countenance.

'*Why* do you want to go away?' she repeated. 'What kind of reason can that be which you fear to tell me? It must be an unworthy reason; and yet I cannot believe that you could have such a reason. Is it on account of my nephew Brian? Have you found out what I have suspected for a long time? Have you discovered that he is in love with you, and do you fancy yourself an ineligible match for him, because he is rich and you are poor, and do you think that you ought to run away in order to give him a chance of doing better for himself? If you have any such high-flown idea, abandon it. The Wendovers are not a mercenary tribe. We shall welcome Brian's bride, whoever she be, for her own sake, and not for her dowry.'

'It is no such reason. I *cannot* tell you. You must forgive me, and let me go.'

'Then I forgive you, and you can go,' replied Miss Wendover, coldly. 'I am deeply disappointed in you. If you cared for me as you say you do, you would trust me. Love without faith is an impossibility. However, I don't want to distress you. If you are to leave me I will make your departure as pleasant as I can. When do you want to go?'

'Immediately. As soon as you can spare me.'

'I cannot spare you at all; a few weeks or days more or less will make no difference to me. Do you want to go among strangers, to be a governess? or do you wish to go back to your people?'

'I want to earn my own living. The harder I have to work the better I shall like it. I would not mind even going into a school, though my experience of Mauleverer is hateful.'

'You shall not go into a school. I will send an advertisement to the *Times*.'

'Would it not be better for me to go to Winchester and apply at some agency for servants and governesses? When I advertised in the *Times* there was not a single answer,'

'You may have better luck this time,' replied Miss Wendover, in a business-like tone. She was too proud to show any further indications of sorrow, or even to reveal how deeply she was wounded. 'I will do what I can to help you, though——'

'Though I do not deserve it,' said Ida.

'You know best about that. Yes,' after some moments of silent thought, 'it may not be too late, even now. When I lunched with the Trevors, at Romsey, the day of Brian's return, Mrs. Trevor's sister, Lady Micheldever, was in a state of anxiety about governesses. Her old governess was to be married in a few weeks, such an inestimable treasure that Lady Micheldever thought it would be impossible to replace her, so sweet, so lady-like, so accomplished. Now, if the situation is not yet filled, I think it would suit you exactly. They are people who would give you a liberal salary—you would be able to help your father.'

'I should be glad of that. Do the Micheldevers live near here?' faltered Ida. 'I want to go quite away.'

'They have property near here, but their place is close to Savernake Forest, and they spend their winters in Italy. Sir George has a weak chest, and all the children are delicate. If you go to them, nearly half your life will be spent abroad.'

'I should like that very much,' said Ida.

'Nothing so pleasant as variety of scenery and people,' replied Miss Wendover, with a touch of irony in her voice.

She began to think Ida cold-hearted and hypocritical. It was evident to her that this feverish longing for change was mere selfish ambition, a desire to be better placed in the world. She had met with the same kind of feeling too often in her rustic *protégées* of the cook and housemaid class, who, when they had learnt all she could teach them, were eager to spread their wings and soar to the servants' halls of Mayfair, and the society of powdered footmen.

'Nine o'clock,' said Miss Wendover, wrapping her shawl round her, and rising to go into the drawing-room as the church clock chimed silver-sweet across the elm tops and the misty meadows.

'Too late for this evening's post; but I will write to Lady Micheldever to-night, and my letter will be ready for the midday mail to-morrow. I hope she has not found anybody yet.'

'You are too good,' faltered Ida, as they went into the lamp-lit room.

'I am only doing my duty,' replied Miss Wendover. 'Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest!'

'You will not tell Bessie, or anyone, till I am gone?' pleaded Ida, earnestly.

'Certainly not—if that is your wish.'

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER A STORM COMES A CALM.

While Ida Palliser was thus planning her escape from that earthly paradise where she was dangerously happy, Brian Wendover was thinking of her and dreaming of her, and building the whole fabric of his life on a happy future to be shared with her, cherishing the sweet certainty that she loved him, and that he had only to say the word which was to unite them for ever. He had been in no haste to say that fateful word; life was so sweet to him in its present stage—he was so confident of the future. He had closely and carefully studied the character of the woman he loved, in the beginning of their acquaintance, before his judgment had lost its balance, before affection had got the better of the critical faculty. He had been in somewise im-

pressed by what Urania had told him about Ida. The slanderer's malice was obvious; but the slander might have some element of truth. He watched Ida narrowly during the first month of their acquaintance, expecting to find the serpent-trail somewhere; but no trace of the evil one had appeared. She was frank, straightforward, intelligent to a high degree, and with that eager thirst for knowledge which is generally accompanied by a profound humility. He could see in her no base worship of wealth for its own sake, no craving for splendour or fashionable pleasures. She found delight in all the simplest things, in rustic scenery, in hill and down and wood, in dogs and horses, and birds and flowers, music and books. A girl who could be happy in such a life as Ida Palliser lived at Kingthorpe must be in a manner independent of fortune; her pleasures were not those that cost money.

'If she is the kind of girl Miss Rylance describes her she will set her cap at me,' he thought. 'If she wants to be mistress of Wendover Abbey, one mistake and one failure will not daunt her.'

But there was no such setting of caps. For a long time Ida treated Mr. Wendover of the Abbey with the perfect frankness of friendship. Then, as his love grew, showing itself by every delicate and unobtrusive token, there came a change, and a subtle one, in her conduct; and the lover told himself with triumphant heart that he was beloved. Her sweet shyness, her careful avoidance of every possible *tête-à-tête*, her evident embarrassment on those rare occasions when she found herself alone with him—surely these things meant love, and love only! There could be no other meaning. He was no coxcomb, ready to believe every woman in love with him. He had gone through the world very quietly, admiring many women, but never till now having found one who seemed to him worth the infinite anxieties, and fevers, and agues of love. And now he had found that pearl above price, the one woman predestinate to be adored by him.

He was happily placed in life for a lover, since a lover should always be an orphan. Fathers

and mothers are sore clogs upon the fiery wheel of love. He was rich; in every way his own master. His kindred were kindly, simple-minded people, who would give gracious welcome to any virtuous woman whom he might choose for his wife. There was no impediment to his happiness, provided always that Ida Palliser loved him; and he believed that she did love him. This sense of security had made him less eager to declare himself. He was content to wait for his opportunity.

And now summer was waning, though it was summer still. The days were no less lovely; not a leaf had fallen in the woods; red roses flushed the gardens with bloom, yellow roses hung in luxuriant clusters on arches and walls; but the days were shortening, the sunsets were earlier, coming inconveniently before dinner was over at The Knoll; and the Wykehamists began to be weighed down by a sense of impending doom, in the direful necessity of going back to school.

Bessie's birthday had come round again—that

date so fatal to Ida Palliser—and there was much cheerfulness at The Knoll in honour of the occasion. This year the event was not to be signalised by a picnic. They had been picnicking all the summer, and it was felt that the zest of novelty would be wanting to that form of entertainment; so it was decided in family counsel that a friendly dinner at home, with a little impromptu dancing, and perhaps a charade or two afterwards, would be an agreeable substitute for the usual outdoor feast. Brian, Mr. Jardine, Dr. and Miss Rylance, Aunt Betsy, and Ida Palliser were to be the only guests; but these with the family made a good-sized party. Blanche undertook to play as many waltzes as might be required of her, and also took upon herself the arrangement and decoration of the dessert, which was to be something gorgeous. More boxes of peaches and grapes had been sent over from Wimperfield, in the absence of Sir Vernon and his brother, who were still in Scotland.

Bessie's anniversary was heralded somewhat inauspiciously by a tremendous gale which swept

across the Hampshire Downs, after doing no small mischief in the Channel, and wrecking a good many fine old oaks and beeches in the New Forest. It was only the tail of a storm which had been blowing furiously in Scotland and the north of England, and no one as yet knew the extent of its destructive force.

The morning after that night of howling winds was dull and blustery, with frequent gusts of rain.

'How lucky we didn't go in for a picnic!' said Horatio, as the slanting drops lashed the windows at breakfast time. 'It may rain and blow as hard as it likes between now and six o'clock, for all we need care. A wet day will give us time to get up our charades, and for Blanche to thump at her waltzes. Be sure you give us the Blue Danube.'

'The Blue Danube is out,' said Blanche, tossing up her pointed chin.

'Out of what? Out of time?'

'Out of fashion.'

'Hang fashion. What do I care for fashion?'

cried the Wykehamist. 'Fashion means other people's whims and fancies. People who are led by fashion have no ideas of their own. Byron is out of fashion, but he's *my* poet,' added Horatio, as who should say, 'and that ought to be a sufficient set-off against any lessening of his European renown.'

'Think of the poor creatures at sea,' murmured kind-hearted Mrs. Wendover, as a sharp gust shook the casement nearest to her.

'Very sad for them, poor beggars,' said Reginald; 'but it would have been sadder for us if we'd been starting for a picnic. Travellers by sea must expect bad weather, it's an important factor in the sum of their risk, and their minds are prepared for the contingency; but when one has planned a picnic party on the downs a wet day throws out all one's calculations.'

The rain came and went in fitful showers, the wind blustered a little, and then died away in sobs, while the young Wendovers spent their morning noisily and excitedly, in laborious industries of the most frivolous kind, the end and aim

of which was to make a gorgeous display in the evening.

Before luncheon the wind was at rest, and the gardens were smiling in the sunlight under the hot blue sky of summer, and after luncheon the Wendover girls and boys were rushing all over the garden cutting flowers.

'I only wish Dr. Rylance were not coming,' said Blanche, stopping to pant and wipe her crimson countenance, when her two baskets were nearly full. 'He'll impart his own peculiar starchiness to the whole business.'

'Oh, hang it, he'll give the thing a grown-up flavour, anyhow,' replied Reginald. 'Besides, the man *can* talk—though he's deuced shallow—and that is more than anyone else can in these parts.'

'Brian will be the hero of this evening's festivity, just as Brian Walford was of the last. Don't you remember how nice he looked?' said Blanche, as they went back to the house loaded with roses, heliotrope, geranium, and ferns.

'Poor fellow!' sighed Bessie, who was so sentimental that she could but suppose her favourite

cousin a martyr to blighted love. 'If Brian of the Abbey proposes to Ida, as I feel convinced he will, and if she accepts him, as she is sure to do, it will simply break Brian Walford's heart.'

'Not a little bit,' said Reginald. 'If he did spoon her last year, is that any reason, do you think, that he should care for her now? If she be not fair to me, what the deuce care I how fair she be? And do you suppose *I* am going to waste in despair, and all that kind of thing? Not if I know it.'

'Say what you like, I believe Brian Walford was deeply in love with Ida, and that he has never been here since that time, because he can't bear to see her, knowing she doesn't care for him.'

'That's skittles!' exclaimed the youthful sceptic, using a favourite expression of his father's to express incredulity. 'The reason Brian doesn't come to Kingthorpe is, that he has other fish to fry elsewhere. As if anybody would come to Kingthorpe who wasn't obliged!'

'Brian used to come.'

'Yes, when he was young and verdant, and I daresay my father used to tip him. He knows better now: he is enjoying himself in Paris—under the pretence of studying law and modern languages—dancing at the *jardin Bullier*, and going on no end, I daresay. *I* know what Paris is.'

'How can you?' exclaimed Bessie, 'you were never there!'

'I was never in the moon, but I'm pretty well acquainted with the geography of that planet. We have fellows in the Upper Sixth who think no more of going to Paris than you do of going to Winchester; and a nice life they lead there. Why, a man who thoroughly knows Paris can steep himself in dissipation for a five-pound note!'

Loud exclamations of horror concluded the conversation.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER A CALM A STORM.

THE dinner party was a success. Bessie beamed radiantly, with her plump arms and shoulders set off by a white gown, and a good deal of rather incongruous trinketry in the way of birthday presents, every item of which she felt bound to wear, lest the givers should be wounded by her neglect. Thus, dear mother's amber necklace did not exactly accord with Mr. Jardine's neat gold and sapphire locket; while the family subscription gift of pink coral earrings hardly harmonised with either. Yet earrings, locket, and necklace were all displayed, and the round white arms were coiled from wrist to elbow with various monstrosities of the bangle breed.

There was a flavour of happiness in the whole feast which could not be damped by any ceremonious stiffness on the part of Dr. Rylance and

his daughter. The physician was all sweetness, all geniality; yet a very close observer might have perceived that his sentiments about Miss Palliser were of no friendly nature. He had tried that young lady and had found her wanting —wanting in that first principle of admiration and reverence for himself, the lack of which was an unpardonable fault.

He had been willing to pardon her for her first rejection of him; telling himself that he had spoken too soon; that he had scared her by his unwise suddenness; that she was wild and wilful, and wanted more gentling before she was brought to the lure. But after a prolonged period of gentle treatment, after such courtesies and flatteries as Dr. Rylance had never before lavished upon anybody under a countess, it galled him to find Ida Palliser growing always colder and more distant, and obviously anxious to avoid his distinguished company. Then came the appearance of Brian Wendover on the scene, and Dr. Rylance was keen enough to see that Mr. Wendover of the Abbey had acquired more

influence over Miss Palliser in a week than he had been able to obtain in nearly a year's acquaintance. And then Dr. Rylance decided that this girl was incorrigible: she was beyond the pale: she was a kind of monster, a being of imperfect development, a blunder of nature—like the sloth and his fellow tardigrades: a psychological mystery: inasmuch as she did not care for him.

So having made up his mind to have done with her, Dr. Rylance found that the end of love is the beginning of hate.

It happened, rather by lack of arrangement than by any special design, that Brian sat next to Ida. Dr. Rylance had taken Mrs. Wendover in to dinner, but Brian was on his aunt's left hand, and Ida was on Brian's left. He talked to her all dinner time, leaving his aunt, who loved to get hold of a medical man, to expatiate to her heart's content on all the small ailings and accidents which had affected her children during the last six months, down to that plague of warts which had lately afflicted Reginald, and which she would be

glad to get charmed away by an old man in the village, who was a renowned wart-charmer, if Dr. Rylance did not think the warts might strike inward.

'Our own medical man is a dear good creature, but so very matter-of-fact,' Mrs. Wendover explained; 'I don't like to ask him these scientific questions.'

Brian and Ida talked to each other all through the dinner, and, although their conversation was of indifferent things, they talked as lovers talk—all unconsciously on Ida's part, who knew not how deeply she was sinning. It was to be in all probability their last meeting. She let herself be happy in spite of fate. What could it matter? In a few days she would have left Kingthorpe for ever—never to see him again. For ever, and never, are very real words to the heart of youth, which has no faith in time and mutability.

After dinner the young people all went straying out into the garden, in the lovely interval between day and darkness. There had been a glorious sunset, and red and golden lights shone over the

low western sky, while above them was that tender opalescent green which heralds the mellow splendour of the moon. The atmosphere was exquisitely tranquil after last night's storm, not a breath stirring the shrubberies or the tall elms which divided the garden from adjacent paddocks.

Ida scarcely could have told how it was that Brian and she found themselves alone. The boys and girls had all left the house together. A minute ago Bessie and Urania were close to them, Urania laying down the law about some distinction between the old Oxford high-church party and the modern ritualists, and Bessie very excited and angry, as became the intended wife of an Anglican priest.

They were alone—alone at the end of the long, straight gravel walk—and the garden around them lay wrapped in shadow and mystery ; all the flowers that go to sleep had folded their petals for the night, and the harvest moon was rising over church-tower and churchyard yews, trees and tower standing out black against the deep purple of that perfect sky. On this same night last year Ida and the other Brian had been walking about this same garden,

talking, laughing, full of fun and good spirits, possibly flirting; but in what a different mood and manner! To-night her heart was overcharged with feeling, her mind weighed down by the consciousness that all this sweet life, which she loved so well, was to come to a sudden end, all this tender love, given her so freely, was to be forfeited by her own act. Already, as she believed, she had forfeited Miss Wendover's affection. Soon all the rest of the family would think of her as Aunt Betsy thought—as a monster of ingratitude; and Urania Rylance would toss up her sharp chin, and straighten her slim waist, and say, 'Did I not tell you so?'

Close to where she was standing with Brian there was an old, old stone sundial, supposed to be almost as ancient as the burial-places of the long-headed men of the stone age; and against this granite pillar Brian planted himself, as if prepared for a long conversation.

The voices of the others were dying away in the distance, and they were evidently all hastening back to the house, which was something less than a quarter of a mile off. Brian and Ida had

been silent for some moments—moments which seemed minutes to Ida, who felt silence much more embarrassing than speech. She had nothing to say—she wanted to follow the others, but felt almost without power or motion.

'I think we—I—ought to go back,' she faltered, looking helplessly towards the lighted windows at the end of the long walk. 'There is going to be dancing. They will want us.'

'They can do without us, Ida,' he said, laying his hand upon her arm; 'but I cannot do without telling you my mind any longer. Why have you avoided me so? Why have you made it so difficult for me to speak to you of anything but trivialities—when you must know—you must have known—what I was longing to say?'

The passion in his lowered voice—that voice of deep and thrilling tone—which had a power over her that no other voice had ever possessed, the expression of his face as he looked at her in the moonlight, told her much more than his words. She put up her hands entreatingly to stop him.

'For God's sake, not another word,' she cried, 'if—if you are going to say you care for me, ever so little, even. Not one more word. It is a sin. I am the most miserable, most guilty, among women, even to be here, even to have heard so much.'

'What do you mean? What else should I say? What can I say, except that I love you devotedly, with all my heart and mind? that I will have no other woman for my wife? You can't be surprised. Ida, don't pretend that you are surprised. I have never hidden my love, I have let you see that I was your slave all along. My darling, my beloved, why should you shrink from me? What can part us for an instant, when I love you so dearly, and know—yes, dearest, *I know* that you love me? *That* is a question upon which no man ever deceived himself, unless he were a fool or a coxcomb. Am *I* a fool, Ida?'

'No, no, no. For pity's sake, say no more. You ought not to have spoken. I am going away from Kingthorpe to-morrow, perhaps for ever.

Yes, for ever. How could I know, how could I think you would care for me? Let me go!' she cried, struggling away from him as he clasped her hand, as he tried to draw her towards him. 'It is hopeless, mad, wicked to talk to me of love: some day you will know why, but not now. Be merciful to me, forget that you have ever known me.'

'Ida, Ida,' shrieked shrill voices in the distance. White figures came flying down the broad gravel-walk, ghost-like in the moonlight.

It was a blessed relief. Ida broke from Brian, and ran to meet Blanche and Bessie.

'Ida, Ida, such fun, such a surprise!' shrieked Blanche, as the flying white figures came nearer, wavered, and stopped.

'Only think of his coming on my birthday again!' exclaimed Bessie, 'and at this late hour —just as if he had dropped from the moon!'

'Who,—who has come?' cried Ida, looking from one to the other, with a scared white face.

It seemed to her as if the moonlit garden

was moving away in a thick white cloud, spots of fire floated before her eyes, and then all the world went round like a fiery wheel.

'Brian—the other Brian—Brian Walford! Isn't it sweet of him to come to-night?' said Bessie.

Ida reeled forward and would have fallen, but for the strong arm that caught her as she sank earthwards, the arm which would have held her and sustained her through all life's journey, had fate so willed it.

She had not quite lost conciousness, but all was hazy and dim. She felt herself supported in those strong arms, caressed and borne up on the other side by Bessie, and thus upheld she half walked, and was half carried along the smooth gravel-path to the house, whence sounds of music came faintly on her ear. She had almost recovered by the time they came to the threshold of the lighted drawing-room; but she had a curious sensation of having been away somewhere for ages, as if her soul had taken flight to some strange dim world and

dwelt there for a space, and were slowly coming back to this work-a-day life.

The drawing-room was cleared ready for dancing. Urania was sitting at the piano playing the Swing Song, with dainty mincing touch, ambling and tripping over the keys with the points of her carefully trained fingers. She had given up Beethoven and all the men of might, and had cultivated the niminy-piminy school, which is to music as sunflowers and blue china are to art.

Brian Walford was standing in the middle of the big empty room, talking to his uncle the Colonel. Mrs. Wendover and her sister-in-law were sitting on a capacious old sofa in conversation with Dr. Rylance.

'Oh, you have come at last,' said Brian Walford, as Ida came slowly through the open window, pale as death, and moving feebly.

He went to meet her, and took her by the hand; then turning to the Colonel he said quietly and seriously,

'Uncle Wendover, it is just a year to-night

since this young lady and I met for the first time. From the hour I first saw her I loved her, and I had reason to hope that she returned my love. We were married at a little church near Mauleverer Manor, on the ninth of October last. After our marriage my wife — finding that I was not quite so rich as she supposed me to be—fearful, I suppose, for the chances of our future—refused to live with me—told me that our marriage was to be as if it had never been—and left me, within three hours of our wedding, for ever, as she intended.'

Ida was standing in the midst of them all —alone. She had taken her hand from her husband's—she stood before them, pale as a corpse, but erect, ready to face the worst.

Brian of the Abbey, that Brian who would have given his life to save her this agony of humiliation, stood on the threshold of the window watching her. Could it be that she was false as fair—she whom he had so trusted and honoured?

Urania had left off playing, and was watching

the scene with a triumphant smile. She looked at Mr. Wendover of the Abbey with a look that meant, 'Perhaps now you can believe what *I* told you about this girl?'

Aunt Betsy was the first to speak.

'Ida,' she said, standing up, 'is there any truth in this statement?'

'That question is not very complimentary to your nephew,' said Brian Walford.

'I am not thinking of my nephew—I am thinking of this girl, whom I have loved and trusted.'

'I was unworthy of your love and your trust,' answered Ida, looking at Miss Wendover with wide, despairing eyes. 'It is quite true—I am his wife—but he has no right to claim me. It was agreed between us that we should part—for ever—that our marriage was to be as if it had never been. It was our secret—nobody was ever to know.'

'And pray, after having married him, why did you wish to cancel your marriage?' asked Colonel Wendover, in a freezing voice. 'You married him of your own free will, I suppose?'

'Of my own free will—yes.'

'Then why repent all of a sudden?'

She stood for a few moments silent, enduring such an agony of shame as all her sad experiences of life had not yet given her. The bitter, galling truth must be told—and in *his* hearing. *He* must be suffered to know how sordid and vile she had been.

'Because I had been deceived,' she faltered at last, her eyelids drooping over those piteous eyes.

Brian of the Abbey had advanced into the room by this time. He was standing by his uncle's side, his hand upon his uncle's arm. He wanted, if it were possible, to save Ida from further questioning, to restrain his uncle's wrath.

'I married your nephew under a delusion,' she said. 'I believed that I was marrying wealth and station. I had been told that the Brian Wendover I knew—the man who asked me to be his wife—was the owner of Wendover Abbey.'

'I see,' said the Colonel; 'you wanted to marry Wendover Abbey.'

Miss Rylance gave a little silvery laugh—the most highly cultivated thing in laughs—but the

scowl she got from Brian of the Abbey checked her vivacity in a breath.

'Oh, I know what a wretch I must seem to you all,' said Ida, looking up at the Colonel with pleading eyes. 'But you have never known what it is to be poor—a genteel pauper—to have your poverty flung into your face like a handful of mud at every hour of your life; to have the instincts, the needs of a lady, but to be poorer and lower in status than any servant; to see your schoolfellows grinning at your shabby boots, making witty speeches about your threadbare gown; to patch, and mend, and struggle, yet never to be decently clad; to have the desire to help others, but nothing to give. If any of you—if you, Miss Rylance, with that exquisite sneer of yours, *you* who invented the plot that wrecked me—if you had ever endured what I have borne, you would have been as ready as I was to thank Providence for having sent me a rich lover, and to accept him gratefully as my husband.'

'Brian Walford,' interrogated the Colonel, looking severely at his nephew, 'am I to understand that

you married this girl without undeceiving her as to the children's, or rather Miss Rylance's, most ill-judged practical joke—that you stood before the altar in God's House, the temple of truth and holiness, and won her by a lie?'

'I never lied to her,' answered Brian Walford sulkily. 'My cousins chose to have their joke, but there was no joke in my love for Ida. I loved her, and was ready to marry her, and take my chance of the future, as another young man in my position would have done. I never bragged about the Abbey, or told her that it belonged to me. She never asked me who I was.'

'Because she had been told a wicked, shameful falsehood, and believed it, poor darling,' cried Bessie, running to her friend and embracing her. 'Oh, forgive me, dear—pray, pray do. It was all my fault. But as you have married him, darling, and it can't be helped, do try and be happy with him, for indeed, dear, he is very nice.'

Ida stood silent, with lowered eyelids.

'My daughter is right, Miss Palliser—Mrs. Brian Walford,' said the Colonel, in a less severe

tone than he had employed before. 'It is quite true that you have been hardly used. Any deception is bad, worst of all a cheat that is maintained as far as the steps of the altar. But after all, in spite of your natural disappointment at finding you had married a poor man instead of a rich one, my nephew is the same man after marriage as he was before, the man you were willing to marry. And I cannot think so badly of you as to believe that you would marry a man you did not love, for the sake of his wealth and position. No, I cannot think that of you. I take it, therefore, that you liked my nephew for his own sake; and that it was only pique and natural indignation at having been duped which made you cast him off and agree to cancel your marriage. And I say that there is only one course open to you, as a good and honourable young woman, and that is to take your husband by the hand, as you took him in the house of God, for better for worse, and face the difficulties of life honestly and fearlessly. Heaven is always on the side of true-hearted young couples.'

Ida lifted her drooping eyelids and looked, not at the Colonel, not at her husband, not at her staunch friend Aunt Betsy, but at that other Brian—at him who this night only had declared his love. She looked at him with despair in her eyes, humbly beseeching him to stand between her and this loathed wedlock. But there was no sign in his sad countenance, no indication except of deepest sorrow, no ray of light to guide her on her path. The Colonel had spoken with such perfect common sense and justice, he had so clearly right on his side, that Brian Wendover, as a man of principle, could say nothing. Here was this woman he loved, and she was another man's wife, and that other man claimed her. If the King of Terrors himself had stretched forth his bony hand and clasped her, she could not be more utterly lost to the man who loved her than she was by this pre-existing tie. Brian of the Abbey was not the man to woo his cousin's wife.

'Do, dearest, be happy,' pleaded Bessie. 'I'm sure father is right. And you are our cousin,

our own flesh and blood now, as it were. And you know I always wanted you to belong to us. And we shall all be fonder of you than ever. And you and Mr. Jardine will be cousins, later on,' she whispered, as a conclusive argument, as if for the sake of so high a privilege a girl might fairly make some sacrifice of inclination.

'Is it my duty to do as Colonel Wendover tells me?' asked Ida, looking round at them all with piteous appeal. 'Is it really my duty?'

'In the sight of God, yes,' said the Colonel and John Jardine.

'Yes, my dear, yes, there can be no doubt of it,' said the Colonel's wife and Aunt Betsy.

Brian of the Abbey said not a word, and Dr. Rylance looked on in silence, with a diabolical sneer.

What a fate for the girl who had refused a house in Cavendish square, one of the prettiest victorias in London, and a matchless collection of old hawthorn blue.

'Then I will do my duty,' said Ida; and then, before Brian Walford could take her in his arms,

or make any demonstration of delight, she threw herself upon Miss Betsy Wendover's broad bosom, sobbing hysterically, and crying, 'Take me away. take me out of this house, for pity's sake.'

'I'll take her home with me. She will be calm, and quiet, and happy to-morrow,' said Aunt Betsy. And then, as Brian Walford was following them, 'Stay where you are, Brian,' she said authoritatively. 'She shall see no one but me till to-morrow. You will drive her crazy among you all, if you are not careful.'

Miss Wendover took the girl away almost in her arms, and Brian Walford disappeared at the same time without further speech.

'And now that the bride and bridegroom are gone, I suppose the wedding party can have their dance,' sneered Urania, playing the first few bars of 'Sweethearts.'

But Brian of the Abbey had vanished immediately after his cousin, and no one was disposed for dancing; so, after a good deal of talk, Bessie's birthday party broke up.

'What a dismal failure it has been, though

it began so well!' said Bessie, as she and the other juveniles went upstairs to bed.

'What! still you are not happy,' quoted Horatio. 'Why, I thought you wanted Brian Walford to marry Ida Palliser?'

'So I did once,' sighed Bessie; 'but I would rather she had married Brian of the Abbey; and I know he's over head and ears in love with her.'

'Ah, then he'll have to put his love in his pipe and smoke it! That kind of thing won't do out of a French novel,' said Horatio, whose personal knowledge of French romancers was derived from the *Philosophe sous les toits*, as published with grammatical notes for the use of schools; but he liked to talk large.

CHAPTER X.

WAS THIS THE MOTIVE?

Brian Walford came back to The Knoll after the younger members of the family had gone to their rooms.

'Where have you been all this time?' asked the Colonel, who was strolling on the broad gravel drive in front of the house, soothing his nerves with a cheroot, after the agitations of the last hour. 'You are to have your old room, I believe; I heard it was being got ready.'

'You are very kind. I walked half way to the Abbey with my cousin. We had a smoke and a talk.'

'I should be glad of a little more talk with you. This business of to-night is not at all pleasant, you know, Brian. It does not redound to anybody's credit.'

'I never supposed that it did; but it is not my fault that there should be this fuss. If my wife had been true to me all would have gone well.'

'I don't think you had a right to expect things to go well, when you had so cruelly deceived her. It was a base thing to do, Brian.'

'You ought not to say so much as that, sir, knowing so little of the circumstances. I did not deliberately deceive her.'

'That's skittles,' said the Colonel, flinging away the end of his cigar.

'It is the truth. The business began in sport. Bessie asked me to pretend to be my cousin, just for fun, to see if Ida would fall in love with me. Ida had a romantic idea about my cousin, it appears, that he was an altogether perfect being, and so on. Well, I was introduced to her as Brian of the Abbey, and though she may have been a little disappointed—no doubt she was—she accepted me as the perfect being. As for me—well, sir, you know what she is—how lovely, how winning. I was a gone coon from

that moment. We kept up the fun—Bess, and the boys, and I—all that evening. I talked of the Abbey as if it were my property, swaggered a good deal, and so on. Then Bess, knowing that I often stayed up the river for weeks on end, asked me to go and see Ida, to make sure that old Pew was not ill-using her, that she was not going into a decline, and all that kind of thing. So I went, saw Ida, always in the company of the German teacher, and took no pains to conceal my affection for her. But I said not another word about the Abbey. I never swaggered or put on the airs of a rich man; I only told her that I loved her, and that I hoped our lives would be spent together. I did not even suggest our marriage as a fact in the near future. I knew I was in no position to maintain a wife.'

'You should have told her that plainly. As a man of honour you were bound to undeceive her.'

'I meant to do it, but I wanted her to be very fond of me first. Then came the row; old

Pew expelled her because she had been carrying on a clandestine flirtation with a young man. Her character was compromised, and as a man of honour I had no course but to propose immediate marriage.'

'Her character was not compromised, because Miss Pew chose to act like a vulgar old tyrant. The German governess, everybody in the school, knew that Miss Palliser was unjustly treated. There was no wound that needed to be salved by an imprudent marriage. But in any case, before proposing such a marriage, it was your bounden duty to tell her the truth about your circumstances, not to marry her to poverty without her full consent to the union.'

'Then I did not do my bounden duty,' Brian Walford answered sullenly. 'I believed in her disinterested affection. Why should she be more mercenary than I, who was willing to marry her without a sixpence in her pocket, without a second gown to her back? How could I suppose she was marrying me for the sake of a fine place and a fine fortune? I thought she was above such sordid considerations.'

You ought to have been sure of that before you married her; you ought to have trusted her fully,' said the Colonel. 'However, having married her, why did you consent so tamely to let her go? Having let her go, why do you come here to-night to claim her?'

'Why did I let her go? Well, she shrewed me so abominably when she found out my lowly position that my pride was roused, and I told her she might go where she pleased. Why did I come here to-night? Well, it was an impulse that brought me. I am passionately fond of her. I have lived without her for nearly a year—angry with her and with fate—but to-day was the anniversary of our first meeting. I knew from Bessie that my wife was here, happy. There was even some hint of a flirtation between her and *the real Brian*,'—these last words were spoken with intense bitterness,—'and I thought it was time I should claim my own.'

'I think so too,' said Colonel Wendover, severely; 'you should have claimed her long ago. Your whole conduct is faulty in the extreme.

You will be a very lucky man if your married life turns out happy after such a bad beginning.'

'Come, Colonel, we are both young,' remonstrated Brian, with that careless lightness which seemed natural to him, as a man who could hardly take the gravest problems of life seriously; 'there is no reason why we should not shake down into a very happy couple by-and-by.'

'And pray how are you to live?' inquired the Colonel. 'You are taking this girl from a most comfortable home—a position in which she is valued and useful. What do you intend to give her in exchange for the Homestead? A garret and a red herring?'

'Oh, no, sir, I hope it will be a long time before we come to that—though Beranger says that at twenty a man and the girl he loves may be happy in a garret. I think we shall do pretty well. My literary work widened a good deal while I was in Paris. I wrote for some of the London magazines, and the editors are good enough to think that I am rather a smart writer. I can earn something by my pen; I think enough to

keep the pot boiling till briefs begin to drop in. My cousin was generous enough to offer me an income just now—four or five hundred a year so long as I should require it—but I told him that I thought I could support my wife with my pen for the next few years.'

'Your cousin is always generous,' said the Colonel.

'Yes, he is an open-handed fellow. I suppose you know that he helped me while I was in Paris?'

'I did not know, but I am not surprised.'

'Very kind of him, wasn't it? The fact is, I was dipped rather deeply, in my small way—tailor, and hosier, and so on—before I left London; and I could not have come back unless Brian had helped me to settle with them, or I should have had to go through the Bankruptcy Court; and I daresay some of you would have thought that a disgrace.'

'Some of us!' exclaimed the Colonel, 'we should all have thought so. Do you suppose the Wendovers are in the habit of cheating their creditors?'

'Oh, but it was not a question of cheating them, only of paying them a rather insignificant dividend. My only assets are my books and furniture, and unluckily some of those are still unpaid for.'

'Assets? You have no assets. You are a spendthrift and a scamp!' protested his uncle, angrily. 'I am deeply sorry for your wife. Good night. If you want any supper after your journey there are plenty of people to wait upon you.'

And with that the Colonel turned upon his heel and went into the house, leaving his nephew to follow at his leisure.

'*Comme il est assommant, le patron*,' muttered Brian, strolling after his kinsman.

Brian Walford was not ordinarily an early riser, but he was up betimes on the morning after Bessie's birthday; breakfasted with the family, and strolled across dewy fields to the Homestead a little after nine o'clock. But although this was a late hour in Miss Wendover's household, his young wife was not prepared to

receive him. It was Aunt Betsy who came to him, after he had waited for nearly a quarter of an hour, prowling restlessly about the drawing-room, looking at the books, and china, and water-colours.

'I have come for Ida,' he said abruptly, when he had shaken hands with his aunt. 'There is a train leaves Winchester at twenty minutes past eleven. She will be ready for that I suppose?'

He was half prepared for reproaches from his aunt, and wholly prepared to set her at defiance. But if she were civil he would be civil: he did not court a quarrel.

'I don't know that she can be ready.'

'But she must. I have made up my mind to travel by that train. Why should there be any delay? Everybody is agreed that we are to begin our lives together, and we cannot begin too soon.'

'You need not be in such a hurry. You have contrived to live without her for nearly a year.'

'That is my business. I am not going to

live without her any longer. Please tell her she must be ready by half-past ten.'

'I will tell her so. I am heartily sorry for her. But she must submit to fate. What home have you prepared for her?'

'At present none. We can go to an hotel for a day or two, and then I shall take lodgings in South Kensington, or thereabouts.'

'Have you any money?'

'Yes, enough to carry on,' answered Brian.

Truthfulness was not his strong point, although he was a Wendover, and that race deemed itself free from the taint of falsehood. There may have been an injurious admixture of races on the maternal side, perhaps; albeit his mother personally was good and loyal. However this was, Brian Walford had, even in trifles, shown himself evasive and shifty.

His aunt looked at him sharply.

'Do not take her to discomfort or want,' she said earnestly. 'She has been very happy with me, poor girl; and although she deceived me, I cannot find it in my heart to be angry with her.'

'There is no fear of want,' replied Brian. 'We shall not be rich, but we shall get on pretty comfortably. Please tell her to make haste. The dog-cart will be round in half an hour. I'll walk about the garden till it comes.'

Miss Wendover sighed, and left him, without another word. He went out into the sunlit garden, and walked up and down smoking his favourite meerschaum, which was a kind of familiar spirit, always carried in his pocket ready for every possible opportunity. He had arranged with one of his uncle's men to drive the dog-cart over to Winchester; his travelling-bag was put in ready; he had taken leave of his kindred —not a very cordial leave-taking upon anybody's part, and on Bessie's despondent even to tears. He was not in a good humour with himself or with Fate; and yet he told himself that things had gone well with him, much better than he could reasonably have expected. Yet it was hard for a young man of considerable personal attractions and some talent, to be treated like one of the monsters of classical legend, a damsel-devouring

Minotaur, when he came to claim his young wife.

The dog-cart was at the gate for at least ten minutes, and Brian had looked at his watch at least ten times before Ida appeared at the glass door. He was pale with anxiety. There were reasons why it might be ruin to him to lose this morning train; and yet he did not want to betray too much eagerness, lest that should spoil his chances.

Here she was at last, white as a corpse, and with red swollen eyelids which indicated a night of weeping. Her appearance was far from flattering to her husband, yet she gave him a wan little smile and a civil good morning.

'Here, Pluto, take your Proserpine,' said Miss Wendover, trying to make light of the situation, though sore at heart. 'I wish you would be content to keep her six months of the year, and let me have her for the other six.'

'It needn't be an eternal parting, Aunt Betsy,' answered Brian, with assumed cheeriness; 'Ida can come to see you whenever you like, and Ida's

husband too, if you will have him. We are not starting for the Antipodes.'

'Be kind to her,' said Miss Wendover, gravely, 'for my sake, if not for her own. It shall be the better for you when I am dead and gone, if you make her a happy woman.'

This promise from a lady who owned a snug little landed estate, and money in the funds, meant a good deal. Brian grasped his aunt's hand.

'You know that I adore her,' he said. 'I shall be her slave.'

'Be a good husband, honest and true. She doesn't want a slave,' replied Miss Wendover, in her incisive way.

Ida flung her arms round that generous friend's neck, and kissed her with passionate fervour.

'God bless you for your goodness to me. God bless you for forgiving me,' she said.

'He is a Being of infinite love and pity, and He will not bless those who cannot pardon,' answered Miss Wendover. 'There, my dear, go and be happy with your young husband. He may not be such a very bad bargain, after all.'

This was, as it were, the old shoe thrown after the bride and bridegroom. In another minute the dog-cart was rattling along the lane, Brian driving, and the groom sitting behind with Ida's luggage, which was more important by one neat black trunk than it had been a year ago.

Bessie and the younger children were standing on the patch of grass outside The Knoll gates, in garden hats, and no gloves, waving affectionate adieux. Brian gave them no chance of any further leave-taking, driving towards the downs at a smart pace.

'Do you remember my driving you to catch the earlier train, a year ago this day?' he asked his pale companion, by way of conversation.

'Yes, perfectly.'

'Odd, isn't it?—exactly one year to-day.'

'Very odd.'

And this was about all their discourse till they were at Winchester Station.

'London papers in yet?' asked Brian.

'No, sir. You'll get them at Basingstoke.'

He took his wife into a first-class carria e—

an extravagance which surprised her, knowing his precarious means.

'I hope you are not travelling first-class on my account,' she said; 'I am not accustomed to such luxury.'

'Oh, we can afford it to-day. I am not quite such a pauper as I was when I offered you those two sovereigns. If you would like to buy yourself a silk gown or a new bonnet, or anything in that line to-day, I can manage it.'

'No, thank you; I have everything I want,' she answered, with a faint shiver.

The memory of that bygone day was too bitter.

'What a wonderful wife! I thought that to be in want of a new bonnet was a woman's normal condition,' said Brian, trying to be lively.

He had bought *Punch* and other comic journals at the station, and spread them out before his wife—as an intellectual feast. The breezy drive over the downs had revived her beauty a little. The eyelids had lost their red swollen look, but she was still very pale, and there was a nervous quiver of the lips now and then which betokened

a tendency to hysteria. She sat at the open window, looking away towards those vanishing hills. A moment, and the tufted crest of St. Catherine's had gone—the low-lying meadows—the winding stream—the cathedral's stunted tower—it was all gone, like a dream.

'Dreadful hole of a place,' said Brian, contemptuously; 'a comfortably feathered old nest for rooks and parsons and ancient spinsters, but a dungeon for anybody else.'

'I think it is the dearest old city in the world.'

'Old enough, and dear enough, in all conscience,' answered Brian. 'My uncle's tailor had the audacity to charge me thirty shillings for a waistcoat. But it's the most deadly-lively place I know. All country towns are deadly-lively; in fact, there are only two places fit for young people to live in—London and Paris!'

'I suppose you mean to live in London?' said Ida, listlessly. She did not feel as if she were personally interested in the matter. If she were forced to live with a man she despised, the place of her habitation would matter very little.

'I mean to oscillate between the two,' answered Brian. 'Were you ever in Paris?'

'Never.'

'I envy you. You have something left to live for—a new sensation—a new birth. We will go there in November.'

He looked for a smile, an expression of pleasure, but there was none. His wife's face was still turned towards the landscape, her sad eyes still fixed on the vanishing hills—no longer those familiar hill-tops around the cathedral city, but like them in character. Soon the last of those chalky ridges would vanish, and then would come the heathy tracts about Woking, and the fertile meads in the Thames valley.

The train stopped for five minutes at Basingstoke, and Brian offered his wife tea, lemonade, anything which the refreshment-room could produce, but she declined everything.

'We two have not broken bread together since we were one,' he said, still struggling after liveliness; 'let us eat something together, if it be only a bath bun.'

'I am not hungry, thanks,' she answered listlessly.

'Papers! papers!' shouted the small imp attached to the bookstall. 'Morning paper—*Times, Standard, Telegraph, Daily News, Morning Post!*'

Brian drew up the window abruptly, as if he had seen a scorpion.

An elderly gentleman trotted up to the carriage, opened the door, and came in, his arms full of newspapers. He settled himself in his corner, and looked about him with a benevolent air, as if courting friendly intercourse. Brian seated himself opposite his wife, looking black as thunder. Ida was indifferent to such petty details of life as unknown elderly gentlemen. Her mind was full of troubled thoughts about the friends she had left—most of all that one friend whose thrilling voice still sounded in her ears—that one voice which had power to move her deepest feeling.

'And come what may, I *have been* bless'd.' That is a woman's first thought in any

desperate case of this kind. The poet struck a note of universal truth in that immortal line. There is endless consolation in the knowledge that heart has answered to heart; that the fond futile love to which Fate forbids a happy issue has not been lavished on a dumb, irresponsive idol. If there has been madness, folly, it has not been one-sided foolishness. He too has loved; he too must suffer. Bind Eloisa with what vows, surround her with what walls you will, even in her despair there is one golden thought: her Abelard has loved her—will love on till the end of life—since such a flame should be eternal as the stars.

He had loved her! Pride and rapture were in the thought. She told herself that such pride, such delight was sinful, and that she must fight against and conquer this sin. She must shut Brian of the Abbey out of her mind for evermore; she must school herself to believe that he and she had never met; so train and subjugate herself that a few months hence she might be able to read the announcement of his

marriage—should such a thing occur—without one guilty pang.

And then she looked back and tried to recall her life before she had known him. What was it like? A blank? She felt like one who has received some injury to the brain, or endured some severe illness which has blotted out all memory of the life which went before. She sat with her pale fixed face turned towards the open window, her eyes gazing on the landscape with a vacant, far-away look—her husband watching her every now and then, furtively, anxiously.

The elderly gentleman in the corner beamed at her occasionally through his spectacles. She was young, handsome, and looked unhappy. He was interested in her, in a benevolent, paternal spirit. He thought it likely that the young man was her brother, though there was no likeness between them; and that she was being parted by family authority from some other young man who was less, and yet more, than a brother. He made up his little story about her, and then, by way of consolation, offered her his *Times*, which he had done with by this time.

Brian turned quickly, and stretched out his hand, as if to intercept the paper; but he was too late. Ida had taken it, and was staring absently at the leading articles.

She read on listlessly, vaguely, for a little while, going over the words mechanically, reading how Sir Somebody Something, a leading light of the Opposition, had been holding forth at an agricultural meeting, arguing that never since the date of Magna Charta had the national freedom been in such peril as it was at this hour; never had any Ministry so wantonly trifled with the rights of a great people, or so supinely submitted to the degradation of a once glorious country; never, within the memory of man, or, he would go further and say, within the records of history, was our agricultural interest so wantonly neglected, our commercial predominance so supinely surrendered, our army so unprepared for action, and our influence in the affairs of Europe so audaciously set at naught. The right honourable gentleman gave the Ministry another year to complete the ruin of their country. They might

do it in six months; yes, he would venture to say, or even in three months; but he gave them at most a year. Favourable accidents, against which even the blind fatuity and garrulous pig-headedness of septuagenarian senility could not prevail, might prolong the struggle; but the day of doom was inevitable, unless——and so on, and so on, with a running commentary by the leader writer.

Ida read without knowing what she was reading, till presently her eyes glanced idly to another part of the page, and there were arrested by a short paragraph headed, FATAL STORM IN THE HEBRIDES.

Was it not in the Hebrides she had last heard of Sir Vernon's yacht the *Seamew?*

"Among other accidents in the terrible gale on Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, we regret to number the loss of the schooner yacht *Seamew*, which was capsized in a squall off the Isle of Skye, with the loss of the owner, Sir Vernon Palliser, his brother, Mr. P. Palliser, Captain Greenway, and seven of the crew. Three

men and the cabin-boy were saved by a fishing boat, the crew of which witnessed the sad catastrophe, but were too far off to be of much help." And then followed a description of the accident, which had been caused by the violence of the storm, rather than by bad seamanship or carelessness on the part of the captain, who, with Sir Vernon and his brother, both skilled seamen, had the vessel well in hand a few minutes before she went down.

Ida let the paper fall from her hand with a cry of horror.

'Vernon, poor Vernon, and Peter too—those good, kind-hearted young men—dead—both dead!'

She burst into tears, remembering the two frank, kind faces looking at her from the marble portico, in the afternoon sunlight, the warm welcome, the feeling of kindred which had shown itself so thoroughly in their words and looks. And they were gone—they who a month ago were full of life and gladness. The cruel inexorable sea had devoured their youth and strength and all the promises and hopes of their being.

The elderly gentleman moved to the seat next hers, full of compassion.

'Look at that,' she said, as Brian picked up the paper; 'my cousins, both of them.'

'I am sorry you have found bad news in the paper,' said the elderly stranger, looking at her sympathetically through his spectacles.

'My two cousins, sir,' she said, 'they have both been drowned. Such fine, honest young fellows. It is too dreadful.'

'That wreck in the Hebrides? Yes, it is a sad thing; and Sir Vernon Palliser and his brother were your cousins? I am so sorry I showed you the paper. But I wonder you had not heard of this sooner; it was in the evening papers yesterday.'

'Then you must have known that my cousins were dead, when you came to Kingthorpe last night?' said Ida, looking up at her husband.

Suddenly, in a flash of memory, came back those thoughtless words of hers spoke at Les Fontaines, when her father talked of the possibility of inheriting a fortune and a baronetcy. She remembered how she had said, in bitterness

of spirit, 'Of course they will live to the age of Methuselah. Whoever heard of luck coming our way?' And now this kind of luck, which meant sudden death for two amiable, open-handed young men, had come her way. How lightly she had spoken of those two young lives! how bitter had been her thoughts about the rich and happy!

This thing had been known in London yesterday afternoon. It was this knowledge which had sent Brian Walford to Kingthorpe to claim his wife. She had suddenly become a wife worth claiming—the daughter of Sir Reginald Palliser of Wimperfield.

'You knew this,' she repeated, looking at her husband, with infinite scorn expressed in eye and lip.

'No, upon my soul,' he answered; 'I left town early. It flashed upon me that it was Bessie's birthday—you would be all assembled at The Knoll—there was just time for me to get there before the fun was over—don't you know——'

'And you had not seen the papers? you did

not know this?' added Ida, fixing him with her eyes.

'No, upon my word. I had no idea!'

She knew that he was lying.

'Then it was a very curious coincidence,' she said freezingly.

'How a coincidence?'

'That after so long an absence you should happen to come to Kingthorpe on the day that made such a change in my father's fortunes.'

'I came because of Bessie's birthday—as I told you before. Does this sad event make any difference to your father?' he asked innocently. 'Are there not——nearer relatives?'

'None that I know of.'

The elderly gentleman, a little hard of hearing, as he called it, looked on and wondered at this somewhat eccentric young couple, who seemed, from those snatches of speech which reached him, to be on the verge of a quarrel. He felt very sorry for the lady, who was so handsome, and so interesting. The young man was gentleman-like and good looking, but had not that frank

bright outlook which is the glory of a young Englishman. He was dressed a little too foppishly for the elder man's liking, and had the air of being over-careful of his own person.

And now the train had passed Sandown, was rushing on to Wimbledon and the London smoke. All the blue had gone out of the sky, all the beauty had gone from the earth, Ida thought, as small suburban villas followed each other in a monotonous sequence, some old and shabby, others new and smart; and then all that is ugliest in the great city surrounded them as they steamed slowly into Waterloo station.

A four-wheel cab took them to an hotel in the purlieus of Fleet Street, a big new hotel, but so shut in and surrounded by other buildings that Ida felt as if she could hardly breathe in it—she who had lived among gardens and green fields, and with all the winds of heaven blowing on her across the rolling downs, from the forest and the sea.

'What a hateful place London is!' she exclaimed. 'Can anyone like to live in it?'

All sensible people like it better than any other

bit of the world, bar Paris,' answered Brian. 'But it is not particularly pretty to look at. City life is an acquired taste.'

This was on the stairs, while they were following the waiter to the private sitting-room for which Mr. Walford had asked. It was a neat little room on the first floor, looking into a stony city square, surrounded by business premises.

The waiter, after the manner of his kind, was loth to leave without an order. Ida declined anything in the way of luncheon; so Brian ordered tea and toast, and the man departed with an air of resignation rather than alacrity, considering the order a poor one.

When they were quite alone Ida went up to her husband, laid her hand upon his arm, and looked up at him with earnest, imploring eyes.

'Brian,' she said, 'I have come with you because I was told it was my duty to come—told so by people who are wiser than I.'

'Of course it was your duty,' Brian answered impatiently. 'Nobody could doubt that. We have been fools to live asunder so long.'

'Do you think we may not be more foolish for trying our lives together—if we do not love each other—or trust each other.'

'I love you—that's all I know about it. As for trusting—well, I think I have been too easy, have trusted you too far.'

'But I do not either love you—or trust you,' she said, lifting up her head, and looking at him with kindling eyes and burning cheeks—ashamed for him and for herself. 'I thought once that I could love you. I know now that I never can; and what is still worse, that I never can trust you. No, Brian, never. You told me a lie to-day.'

'How dare you say that?'

'I dare say what I know to be the truth—the bitter, shameful truth. You lied to me to-day in the railway-carriage, when you told me that you did not know of my cousin's death last night—that you did not know of the change in my father's position.'

'You are a nice young lady to accuse your husband of lying,' he answered, scowling at her. 'I tell you I saw no evening papers: I left London

at half-past five o'clock. But even if I had known, what does that matter? It makes no difference to my right over your life. You are my wife, and you belong to me. I was fool enough to let you go last October: you were in such a fury that you took me off my guard; I had no time to assert my rights: and then, *vogue la galére* has always been my motto. But the time came when I felt that I had been an ass to allow myself to be so treated; and I made up my mind to claim you, and to stand no denial of my rights. This determination was some time ripening in my mind; and then came Bessie's birthday, the anniversary of our first meeting, the birthday of my love, and I said to myself that I would claim you on that day, and no other.'

'And that day and no other made my father a rich man. Poor Vernon! poor Peter! so brave, so frank, so true! to think that *you* should profit by their death,' this she said with ineffable contempt, looking at him from head to foot, as if he were a creature of inferior mould. 'But perhaps you mistook the case. I am not an heiress, remember, even now. I have a little brother who will inherit everything.'

'I have not forgotten your brother. I don't want you to be an heiress. I want you—and your love.'

'That you never will have,' she cried passionately; and then she fell on her knees at his feet—she to whom he had knelt on their wedding-day—and lifted her clasped hands with piteous entreaty, 'Brian Walford, be merciful to me. I do not love you, I never loved you, can never love you. In an evil hour I took the fatal step which gives you power over me. But, for God's sake, be generous, and forbear to use that power. No good can ever come of our union—no good, but unspeakable evil; nothing but misery for me—nothing but bitterness for you. We shall quarrel—we shall hate each other.'

'I'll risk that,' he said; 'you are mine, and nothing shall make me give you up.'

'Nothing?' she cried, rising suddenly, and flaming out at him like a sibyl—'nothing? Not even the knowledge that I love another man?'

'Not even that. Let the other man beware, whoever he is. And you beware how you keep to

your duty as my wife. No, Ida, I will not let you go. I was a fool last year—and I was taken unawares. I am a wiser man now, and my decision is irrevocable. You are my wife, my goods, my chattels—God help you, if you deny my claim.'

CHAPTER XI.

TAKING LIFE QUIETLY.

It was the second week in October, and the woods were changing their green liveries of summer for tawny and amber tints, so various and so harmonious in their delicate gradations that the eye of the artist was gladdened by their decay. The hawthorns in Wimperfield Park glowed in the distance like patches of crimson flame, and the undulating sweeps of bracken showed golden-brown against the green-sward; while the oaks—symbolic of all that is solid, ponderous, and constant in woodland nature, slow to bloom and slow to die—had hardly a faded leaf to mark the coming of winter.

A fine domain, this Wimperfield Park, with its hill and vale, its oaks and beeches, and avenue

of immemorial elms, to be owned by the man who six weeks ago had no better shelter than a lath and plaster villa in a French village, and who had found it a hard thing to pay the rent of that trumpery tenement: and yet Sir Reginald Palliser accepted the change in his circumstances as tranquilly as if it had been but a migration from the red room to the blue. He took good fortune with the same easy indolent air with which he had endured evil Fortune. He had the Horatian temperament, uneager to anticipate the future, content if the present were fairly comfortable, sighing for no palatial halls overarched with gold and ivory, no porphyry columns, or marble terraces encroaching upon the sea. He was a man to whom it had been but a slight affliction to live in a small house, and to be deprived of all pomp and state, nay, even of the normal surroundings of gentle birth, so long as he had those things which were absolutely necessary to his own personal comfort. He was honestly sorry for the untimely fate of his young kinsmen; but he slipped into his nephew's vacant place

with an ease which filled his wife and daughter with wonder.

To poor little Fanny Palliser, who had never known the sensation of a spare five-pound note, nay, of even a sovereign which she might squander on the whim of the moment, this sudden possession of ample means was strange even to bewilderment. Not to have to cut and contrive any more, not to have to cook her husband's dinners, or to run about from morning till twilight, supplementing the labours of an incompetent maid-of-all-work, was to enter upon a new phase of life almost as surprising as if she, Fanny Palliser, had died and been buried, and been resolved back into the elements, to be born again as a princess of the blood royal. She kept on repeating feebly that it was all like a dream—she had not been able to realise the change yet.

To Reginald Palliser the inheritance of Wimperfield was only a return to the home of his childhood. To his lowly-born little helpmeet it was the beginning of a new life. It was a new

sensation to Fanny Palliser to live in large rooms, to walk about a house in which the long corridors, the wide staircase, the echoing stone hall, the plenitude of light and space, seemed to her to belong to a public institution rather than to a domestic dwelling—a new sensation, and not altogether a pleasant one. She was awe-stricken by the grandeur—the largeness and airiness of her new surroundings.

There was not one of the sitting-rooms at Wimperfield in which even after a month's residence, she could feel thoroughly at home. She envied Mrs. Moggs, the housekeeper, her parlour looking into the stable-yard, which seemed to Sir Reginald's wife the only really snug room within the four walls of that respectable mansion. Mrs. Moggs's old-fashioned grate and brass fender, little round table, tea-tray, and kettle singing on the hob, reminded Fanny Palliser of her own girlhood, when her mother's sitting-room had worn just such an air of humble comfort. Those white and gold drawing-rooms, with their amber satin curtains and Georgian furniture, had a scenic and

altogether artificial appearance to the unaccustomed eyes of one born and reared amidst the narrow surroundings of poverty.

And then, again, how terrible was that highly respectable old butler, who knew the ways of gentle folks so much better than his new mistress did; and who put her to shame, in a quiet, unconscious way, a hundred times a day by his superior knowledge and experience. How often she asked for things that were altogether wrong; how continually she exposed her ignorance, both to Rogers the butler, and to Moggs, the housekeeper; and what a feeble creature she felt herself in the presence of Jane Dyson, her own maid, who had come to her fresh from the sainted presence of an archbishop's wife, and who was inclined to be slightly dictatorial in consequence, always quoting and referring to that paragon of women, her late mistress, whose only error in life had been the leaving it before Jane Dyson had saved enough to justify her retirement from service. Those highly-educated retainers were a terror to poor little Fanny Palliser. There were

times when she would have been glad to be impecunious again, and running after her faithful Lizette, who had every possible failing except that of being superior to her mistress. These Wimperfield servants were models; but they did not disguise their quiet contempt for a lady who was evidently a stranger in that sphere where powdered footmen and elaborate dinners are among the indispensables of existence.

Only six weeks, and Sir Reginald and his family were established in the place that had been Sir Vernon's, and the old servants waited on their new lord, and all the mechanical routine of life went on as smoothly as if there had been no change of masters. Ida found herself wondering which was the reality and which the dream—the past or the present. There had been a few days of excitement, hurry, and confusion at Les Fontaines after the awful news of the wreck: and then Sir Reginald had come to London with his wife and boy, and had put up at the Grosvenor Hotel while the lawyers settled the details of his inheritance. Sir Vernon had left no

will. Everything went to the heir-at-law—pictures, plate, horses and carriages, and those wonderful cellars of old wine which had been slowly accumulated by Sir Reginald's father and grandfather.

Reginald Palliser passed from the pittance of a half-pay captain, eked out by the desultory donations of his open-handed nephew, to the possession of a fine income and a perfectly-appointed establishment. There was nothing for him to do, no trouble of furnishing, or finding servants. He came into his kingdom, and everything was ready for him. Yet in this house where he was born, in which every stone was familiar to him, how little that was mortal was left of those vanished days of his youth! Among all these old servants there was only one who remembered the new master's boyhood; and that was a deaf old helper in the garden, a man who seemed past all labour except the sweeping up of dead leaves, being himself little better than a withered leaf. This man remembered wheeling the present baronet about the gardens

in his barrow, forty years ago—his function even then being to collect the fallen leaves—and was a little offended with Sir Reginald for having forgotten the man and the fact.

At the Grosvenor Hotel, calm even in the dawn of his altered fortunes, Brian Walford found his father-in-law, and told, with the pleasantest, most plausible air, the story of Ida's clandestine marriage, slurring over every detail that reflected on himself, and making very light of Ida's revulsion of feeling, which he represented as a girlish whim, rather than a woman's bitter anger against the husband who had allowed her to marry him under a delusion as to his social status.

Sir Reginald was at first inclined to be angry. The whole thing was a mystification—absurd, discreditable. His daughter had grossly deceived him. It needed all the stepmother's gentle influence to soften the outraged father's feelings. But Lady Palliser said all that was kindly about Ida's youth and inexperience, her impulsive nature; and a man who has just dropped into £7,000 a-year is hardly disposed to be inflexible. Sir Reginald

was too generous even to question Brian closely as to his capability of supporting a wife. The man was a gentleman—young, good-looking, with winning manners, and a member of a family in which his daughter had found warm and generous friends. Ida's father could not be uncivil to a Wendover.

'Well, my good fellow, it is altogether a foolish business,' he said; 'but what's done cannot be undone. I am sorry my daughter did not ask my leave before she plunged into matrimony; but I suppose I must forgive her, and her husband into the bargain. You have both acted like a pair of children, falling in love and marrying, and quarrelling, and making friends again, without rhyme or reason; but the best thing you can do is to bring your wife—your wife? my little Ida a wife? good God, how old I am getting!—yes, you had better bring her to Wimperfield next week, and then we can get better acquainted with you, and I shall see what I can do for you both.'

This no doubt meant a handsome allowance.

Brian Walford felt, for the first time in his life, that he had fallen on his feet. He hated the country, and Wimperfield would be only a shade better than Kingthorpe; but it was essential that he should please his easy-tempered father-in-law.

'If he wanted me to live in the moon I should have to go there!' he said to himself. And then Lady Palliser went into an adjoining chamber and brought forth little Vernon, to exhibit him, as a particular favour and privilege, to Ida's husband; and Brian, who detested children, had to appear grateful, and to address himself to the irksome task of making friends with the little man. This was not easy, for the boy, though frank and bright enough in a general way, did not take to his new connexion: and it was only when Brian spoke of Ida that his young brother-in-law became friendly. 'Where is she? why haven't you brought her? Take me to her directly-minute,' said the child, whose English savoured rather of the lower than the upper strata of society.

Brian snapped at the opportunity, and carried the boy off instanter in a Hansom cab, to that hotel near Fleet Street where his young wife was pining in her second-floor sitting-room, like a wild woodland bird behind the bars of a cage. The young man thought the little fellow might be a harbinger of peace—nor was he mistaken, for Ida melted at sight of him, and seemed quite happy when they three sat down to a dainty little luncheon, she waiting upon and petting her young brother all the while.

'This is partridge, isn't it?' asked Vernie. 'I like partridge. We always have nice dinners now—jellies, and creams, and wine that goes fizz; and we all have the same as pa. We didn't in France, you know,' explained the boy, unconscious of any reason for suppressing facts in the presence of the waiter. 'Mamma and I used to have any little bits—it didn't matter for us, you know—*we* could pinch. Mamma was used to it, and it was good for me, you know, because I'm bilious—and it's better to go without rich things than to take Gregory's powder, isn't it?'

'Decidedly,' said Brian, who was not too old to remember that bugbear of the Edinburgh pharmacopæia.

'And now we have dessert every day,' continued Vernie; 'lovely dessert—almonds and raisins, and pears, and nuts, and things, just like Christmas Day. I thought that kind of dessert was only meant for Christmas Day. And we have men to wait upon us, dressed like clergymen, just like him,' added the child, pointing to the waiter.

'Oh, Vernie, it's so rude to point,' murmured Ida.

'Not for me; I can't be rude,' replied the boy, with conviction. 'I'm a baronet's son. I shall be a baronet myself some day. Mamma told me. I may do what I like.'

'No, pet, you must be a gentleman. If you were a king's son you would have to be that.'

'Then I wouldn't. What's the use of being rich if you can't do what you like?' demanded Vernie, who already began to have ideas, and who was as sharp for his age as the chicken which begins to catch flies directly its head is out of the shell.

What's the good of being somebody if you have to behave just as well as if you were nobody?' said Brian. 'Little Vernon has the feudal idea strongly developed; no doubt an evolution from some long-departed ancestor, who lived in the days when there were different laws for the knight and the villain. Now, how are we going to amuse this young gentleman? I have leave to keep him till half-past seven, when we are all three to dine with Sir Reginald and Lady Palliser at the Grosvenor.'

Vernie, who was half way through his second glass of sparkling moselle, burst out laughing.

'Lady Palliser!' he exclaimed, 'it's so funny to hear mamma called Lady: because she isn't a lady, you know. She used to run about the house all day with her sleeves tucked up, and she used to cook; and Jane, our English servant, said no lady ever did that. Jane and mamma used to quarrel,' explained the infant, calmly.

'Jane knew very little about what makes a lady or not a lady,' said Ida, grieved to find a want of elevation in the little man's ideas. 'Some

of the truest and noblest ladies have worked hard all their lives.'

'But not with their sleeves tucked up,' argued the boy, 'no lady would do that. Papa told mamma so one day, and *he* must know. He told her she was cook, slush, and bottle-washer. Wasn't that funny? You worked hard too, didn't you, Ida?' interrogated Vernon. 'Papa said you were a regular drudge at Miss Pew's. He said it was a hard thing that such a handsome girl as you should be a drudge, but his poverty and not his will consented.'

'Vernie quotes Shakespeare,' exclaimed Brian, trying to take the thing lightly, but painfully conscious of the head waiter, who was deliberately removing crumbs with a silver scraper. It could not matter to any one what the waiter—a waif from Whitechapel or the Dials most likely—knew or did not know of Mr. and Mrs. Wendover's family affairs; but there is an instinctive feeling that any humiliating details of life should be kept from these menials. They should be maintained in the delusion that the superior class which employs

them has never known want or difficulty. Perhaps the maintenance of this great sham is not without its evil, as it is apt to make the waiter class rapacious and exacting, and ready to impute meanness to that superior order which has wallowed in wealth from the cradle.

'Suppose we go to the Tower?' inquired Brian. 'Perhaps Vernie has never seen the Tower?'

Neither Vernon nor Ida had seen that stony page of feudal history, and Vernon had to be informed what manner of building it was, his sole idea of a tower being Babel, which he had often tried to reproduce with his wooden bricks, with no happier result than was obtained in the original attempt. So another hansom was chartered, and they all went off to the Tower, Vernon sitting between them, perky and loquacious, and intensely curious about every object they passed on their way.

Interested in the associations of the grim old citadel, amused and pleased by little Vernon's prattle, as he trotted about holding his sister's hand, Ida forgot to be unhappy upon that particular

afternoon. The whole history of her marriage was a misery to her; the marriage itself was a mistake; but there are hours of respite in the saddest life, and she was brave enough to try and make the best of hers. Above all, she was too generous to wish her husband to be painfully conscious of the change in their relative positions, that he was now in a manner dependent upon her father. Her own proud nature, which would have profoundly felt the humiliation of such a position as that which Brian Walford now occupied, was moved to pity for those feelings of shame and degradation which he might or might not experience, and she was kinder to him on this account than she would have been otherwise.

The dinner at the Grosvenor went off with as much appearance of goodwill and proper family feeling as if there had been no flaw in Ida's matrimonial bliss. Sir Reginald was full of kindness for his new son-in-law; as he would have been for any other human creature whom he had asked to dinner. Hospitality was a natural instinct of his being, and he invited Brian Wendover to take up

his abode at Wimperfield as easily as he would have offered him a cigar.

'There are no end of rooms. It is a regular barrack,' he said. 'You and Ida can be very comfortable without putting my little woman or me out of the way.'

This had happened just six weeks ago, and now Ida and her half-brother were wandering about among the ferny hollows, and breezy heights of the park, or roving off to adjacent heaths and hills, and it seemed almost as if they had lived there all their lives. Vernon had been quick to make himself at home in the stately old house, rummaging and foraging in every room, routing out all manner of forgotten treasures, riding his father's old rocking-horse, exploring stables and lofts, saddle-rooms, and long-disused holes and corners, going up ladders, climbing walls, and endangering life and limbs in every possible way which infantine ingenuity could suggest.

'Mama, however could we live so long in that horrid little house in France?' he demanded one day, as he prowled about his mother's spacious

morning-room in the autumn dusk, dragging fine old folios out of a book shelf in his search for picture-books, while Lady Palliser and her stepdaughter sat at tea by the fire.

The lady of the house gave a faint sigh.

'I don't know, Vernie,' she said. 'I almost think I was happier there than I am here. It was a poor little place, but I felt it was my own house, and I never feel that here.'

'It will be my house when papa's dead,' replied Vernon cheerfully, seating himself on the ground in front of the broad bay window and turning over Gell's Pompeiana; 'everything will be mine. Is that why you don't feel as if it was yours now?'

'No, Vernie, that's not it. I hope it will be a great many years before your father is taken away.'

'But you don't think so,' argued Vernon. 'You told him the other day that if he did not walk more, and take less champagne, he would soon kill himself.'

'But I didn't mean it, darling. I only spoke for his good. The doctor says he must take no champagne, or only the dryest of the dry.'

'What a silly that doctor must be!' interrupted Vernon; 'all wine is wet.'

'The doctor meant wine that is not sweet, dear.'

'Then he should have said so,' remarked Vernon, sententiously. He had lived all his little life in grown-up society, and had been allowed to hear everything, and to talk about everything, whereby he had come to consider himself an oracle.

'The doctor thinks your poor papa has a lym—lym—'

'Lymphatic temperament?' suggested Ida.

'Yes, dear, that's the name of his complaint,' replied Lady Palliser, who was not scientific. 'He has a—well, that particular disease,' continued the little woman, breaking down again, 'and he ought to diet himself and take regular exercise; and he won't diet himself, and he won't walk or ride; and I lay awake at nights thinking of it,' she concluded, piteously.

'You can't lay awake,' said the boy; 'Ida says you can't. You can lay down your hat or your umbrella, but *you* can't lay. It's impossible.'

'But I tell you I do, Vernie; I lay awake night

after night,' protested Lady Palliser, not seeing the grammatical side of the question. 'Oh, Vernie!' as the folio plates gave an alarming crackle, 'you are tearing that beautiful big book which cost your grandfather so much money.'

'It's a nasty book,' said Vernon, 'all houses and posts and things. Show me some nice books, Ida; please, do?'

Ida was sitting on the carpet beside him in the next minute; and together they went through a folio Shakespeare with awe-inspiring illustrations by Fuseli. She told him what the pictures meant, and this naturally compelled her to tell the stories of the plays, and in this manner she kept him amused till it was time to dress for dinner, and almost bedtime for the little man. The happiest hours of her life were those in which she devoted herself mentally and bodily to her young brother. If he had loved her in adversity a year ago, he loved her still better in prosperity, when she was able to do so much more for his comfort and amusement. He was rarely out of her sight, the companion of all her rides and rambles, the exacting charge of her life,

Brian Walford was not slow to perceive that the boy took precedence of him in all his wife's thoughts, that the boy's society was more agreeable to her than that of her husband, and his health and happiness of more importance. As a wife she was amiable, submissive, dutiful; but it needed no hyper-sensitiveness on the husband's part to warn him that she gave him duty without love, submission without reverence or esteem. The consciousness of his wife's indifference made Mr. Wendover less agreeable than he had been during that brief courtship among the willows and rushes by the river. He was inclined to be captious, and did not conceal his jealousy of the boy from Ida, although he set a watch upon his tongue in the presence of Vernon's father and mother.

After all it was a rather pleasant thing to have free quarters at Wimperfield, to have hunters to ride, and covers to shoot over which were almost as much his own as if they had belonged to him. Sir Reginald Palliser had a large way of conferring benefits, which was instinctive in a man of his open and careless temper. Having given Brian Wendover what he called the run of

his teeth at Wimperfield, he had no idea of limiting the privileges of residence there. Even when the stud-groom grumbled at the laming of a fine horse by injudicious bucketting up hill and down hill in a lively run with the Petersfield Harriers, Sir Reginald made light of the injury, and sent Pepperbox into the straw-yard to recover at his leisure. His own use of the stable was restricted to an occasional ride on an elderly brown cob, of aristocratic lineage and manners that would have been perfect but for the old-gentleman-like habit of dropping asleep over his work. The new baronet was too lazy to hunt, too liberal to put down the hunting stable established by his predecessor. The horses were there—let Ida and Brian ride them. Of those good things which the blind Goddess had flung into his lap nothing was too good for his daughter or his daughter's husband in Sir Reginald's opinion.

Happily for the domestic peace, Lady Palliser was able to get on harmoniously with her step-daughter's husband, and was not disposed to grudge him the luxuries of Wimperfield.

Brian Walford had been quick to take that good-hearted little woman's intellectual measure. He flattered her small vanities, and made her so pleased with herself that she was naturally pleased with him. His shallow and frivolous nature made him livelier company than a man of profounder thought and deeper feeling. He sang light and lively music from the comic operas of the day, nay, would even stoop to some popular strain from the music-halls. He was clever at all round games and drawing-room amusements. He enlivened conversation with puns, which ranged from the utterly execrable to the tolerably smart. He quoted all the plays and burlesques that had been acted in London during the last five years; he could imitate all the famous actors; and he was a past master of modern slang. There was not much society within an easy drive of Wimperfield, but the few jog-trot county people who dined, or lunched, or afternoon-tea'd with the Pallisers were enlivened by Mr. Wendover's social gifts, and talked of him afterwards as a talented young man.

So far Mr. Wendover had taken the goods the gods provided with a placid acceptance, and had shown no avidity for independence. He was silent as to his professional prospects, although Sir Reginald had told him in the beginning of things that if he wanted to make his way at the Bar any money required for the smoothing of his path should be provided.

'You are too good,' Brian answered lightly; 'but it isn't a question of money—it's a question of time. The Bar is a horribly slow profession. A man has to eat his heart out waiting for briefs.'

'Yes, I have always heard as much,' said Sir Reginald; 'but will it do as well for you to eat your heart out down here as in the Temple? Will the briefs follow you to Wimperfield when the propitious time comes?'

'I believe they are about as likely to find me here as anywhere else,' answered Brian, moodily, —he was apt to turn somewhat sullen at any suggestion of hard work—'and in the meanwhile I am not wasting my time. I can go on writing for the magazines.'

That writing for the magazines was an unknown quantity. The young man occasionally shut himself in a little upstairs study on a wet day, smoked excessively, and was supposed to be writing laboriously, his intellect being fed and sustained by tobacco. Sometimes the result of the day was a fat package of manuscript despatched to the post-office; sometimes there was no result except a few torn sheets of foolscap in the waste-paper basket. Sometimes the manuscript came back to the writer after a considerable interval; and at other times Mr. Wendover informed his wife vaguely that 'those fellows' had accepted his contribution. Whatever honorarium he received for his work was expended upon his *menus plaisirs*—or may be said rather to have dribbled from his waistcoat pocket in a series of trivial extravagances which won him a reputation for generosity among grooms and such small deer. To his wife he gave nothing: she was amply provided with money by her father, who would have lavished his newly-acquired wealth upon her if she had been disposed to spend it; but she was

not. Her desires were no more extravagant now than when she was receiving ten pounds a quarter from Miss Wendover. Sooth to say, the temptations to extravagance at Wimperfield were not manifold. Ida's only need for money was that she might give it to the poor, and that, according to Jeremy Taylor, is to send one's cash straight to heaven.

The few old established inhabitants of the neighbourhood, mostly sons of the soil, who attended the village church, were very plain in their raiment, knowing that they occupied a position in the general regard which no finery of velvets or satins could modify. Did not everybody about Wimperfield know everybody else's income, how much or how little the various estates were encumbered, the poverty or richness of the soil, and the rent of every farm upon it? It was only when Lady Pontifex of Heron Court came down from town, bringing gowns and cloaks and bonnets from Regent Street or the Rue de la Paix, that a transitory flash of splendour lighted up the shadowy old nave with the glow

of newly-invented hues, and the sheen of newly woven fabrics. But the natives only gazed and admired. There was nobody adventurous enough to imitate the audacities of a lady of fashion. Miss Emery, of Petersfield, was quite good enough for the landed gentry of this quiet region. She had the fashions direct from Paris in the gaily coloured engravings of *Le Follet*, and what could anyone want more fashionable than Paris fashions? True that Miss Emery's conscientious cutting and excellent workmanship imparted a certain heaviness to Parisian designs; but who would care to have a gown blown together, as it were, by girls who were not allowed to sit down at their work?

The life at Wimperfield was a pleasant life, albeit exceedingly quiet. There were times when Brian Walford felt the dulness of this rustic existence somewhat oppressive; but if life indoors was monotonous and uneventful, he had a good deal of amusement out of doors, hunting, shooting, foot-ball, and an occasional steeple-chase within a day's drive. And a grand point was that

nobody asked him to work hard. He could make a great show of industry with books and foolscap, and nobody pryed too closely into the result.

END OF VOL. II.

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